Monsters by Blink_Blue

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Summary:

The worst monster Billy knows is the one inside himself. It lashes out like a wild, raging animal. In the aftermath, compulsive and guilt-ridden, Billy has to face a few hard truths.

Harrington couldn't possibly hate him as much as he hates himself.

1. Chapter 1

Author's Note:

> My first Stranger Things fic. I fell hard into this ship.
> I'd love some feedback, and hope you enjoy!

Billy hears the whispers in the hallways before he sees the evidence with his own eyes. Hushed murmurs and muffled laughs, tainting the air like smoke. The tension between his shoulder blades stifles every step he takes as people eagerly step out of his way. He's used to the attention. Craves it even. A classmate pats him on the back as he walks past.

"You see Harrington?"

Billy doesn't answer. He just keeps an open ear as he continues down his path. There are more murmurs as he makes his way.

"Who beat up Harrington?"

"Did you see Harrington's face?"

There's a hitch in his breath that he masks with a steady, forced cadence. He feels flushed and edgy as his eyes search out the subject of so many whispers.

A harsh beat thrums through his veins. He remembers Harrington's face snapping to the side when his fist slammed into his head, again and again. He remembers the blood, red and bright, clouding his vision and coating his knuckles. He remembers the pain, numbed by his own anger.

Billy squeezes his eyes shut-only for a moment. It's all he needs to get his cool exterior back into place.

It's been two days since he woke up on a stranger's floor, surrounded by meaningless scribbles and a disheveled house. Panic flooded his veins when he saw no step-sister and a missing Camaro. The drugs wore off slow, his limbs sluggish and unresponsive. It took almost two hours for him to walk home, dreading the moment of his return.

He could almost hear his father's anger. He could feel the force of it hitting him like a truck.

But the house was quiet and dark when he got back. His Camaro was parked in front of the house, his sister sound asleep in her bed. His parents didn't even bother waiting up for him. Apparently, they couldn't be fussed to ask why his car made it back without him.

He never asked Max how that happened.

She certainly wouldn't have dignified him with an explanation. The bitch gave him nothing but a glare for his troubles.

He had sighed when he saw the broken headlight, the scratches on the bumper, and the dents in the frame. But he decided to let it go. It's not the hill he wants to die on. Especially when he spends the rest of the weekend remembering Harrington's face being beaten bloody under his own fists.

Billy pauses when he finally spots the man who had been the subject of his dreams since the day he stepped foot in Hawkins High. Dreams that are more like nightmares.

The messy strands of hair falling into his face don't do much to hide the bruises.

Billy takes a slow breath before he walks up to him. He leans against the lockers until Harrington finally looks at him. The other man looks loathed to do so. He glares and Billy simply stares back. He bites his lip as he slips on a perfected smirk.

"Pretty face, Harrington," Billy murmurs as he leans close, licking his lips, getting into the other man's space as Harrington stands his ground.

"Fuck off."

"You'd like that, wouldn't you?"

Harrington breaks their eye contact first, turning back to his locker as he throws his books into it. It gives Billy a chance to study the damage he inflicted in his moment of wild, uncontrolled rage. Bruises

litter both eyes. His cheeks are swollen, and Billy fights the urge to press his thumb into the painful cut across Harrington's lip. He knows perfectly well he broke the other man's nose. He wonders how long it took for the bleeding to stop.

"What do you want, Billy?"

It's a loaded question and Harrington has no idea. How could he comprehend what Billy has wanted since the moment he laid eyes on him, when Billy can't fully accept it himself? He was pulled into Steve's orbit the moment he stepped foot into this god awful hick town. Getting Steve's attention had been his primary focus. It was so strong and undeniable that it swayed his very being. This other-worldly power from being in his presence, god how Billy *hates* the man for having this power over him.

He can't fucking shake it.

So he laughs instead. "Just tryin' to get a rise out of you, Harrington. That's all."

"Right," Steve breathes, turning away. "Whatever."

A small, rational thought tells him he should step back. But like always, he ignores it and leans even closer. So close that Harrington must be able to feel his warm breath on his battered cheek.

"I had to walk home, you little shit," Billy says quietly. His hand tightens on Harrington's elbow, and he feels the other man tense as he exhales. "How'd my sister get back, huh? Pretty sure I laid you on the ground in no condition to drive."

Steve angrily shoves off his grip. The bruises on his face somehow seem brighter when Steve turns his full gaze upon him. His eyes are dark with frustration before he finally speaks. "Your sister's a shit driver."

Billy blinks. He hadn't guessed that she'd have the guts to drive his car. Or the height.

"If you lay a hand on her, I'll know."

Billy tenses at the words. Harrington must see it because he stands a little taller. “You don’t get to give her shit anymore.”

Billy scoffs to mask the unsteadiness pulsing in his chest. “What are you, her keeper now?” He grins, incredulous and cruel. “Maybe you shouldn’t be perving over thirteen year old girls, you ever think about that? What’s the matter, Harrington? Can’t find a bitch your own age to suck your cock?”

Steve slams his locker door shut with enough force to quiet the chatter around them. He physically winces from the echo, but recovers quickly. “I mean it,” he snarls. “And stay the hell away from Lucas Sinclair.”

Billy snorts, his brow furrowing at the ridiculousness of the notion. It's laughable. Lucas Sinclair? Does Harrington actually give a fuck?

“Why are you so fucking obsessed with those kids?”

He can’t tell if Harrington is tired or if he simply can’t find the will to fight. His shoulders sag. The purple on his cheeks is angry against the harsh fluorescent lights.

“Why are you such a fucking asshole?” Harrington manages through gritted teeth.

“What are you talking about?” Billy’s eyes narrow as he grins, painfully wide. “I’m a joy to be around, Harrington.”

“Yeah,” the other man says sarcastically. “You’re a real delight.”

Billy quickly displaces the vague look of guilt that flashes across his features. His hands tremble by his sides and he clenches them into fists to steady the way they shake. It gives him the power he needs to hold the mask on his face.

“I’ll see you in practice.”

“I was thinkin’ about skipping,” Harrington says easily.

Billy raises his eyebrows as he jerks his chin forward. “What’s wrong? Can’t handle it after that beatdown I gave you?”

Steve grimaces and sends him a glare that causes a flutter in his chest. “You beat the shit out of me,” he says, stating the obvious.

“You were the one perving on my little sister.”

“I wasn’t-” Steve cuts himself off with a shallow breath. “I wasn’t *perving*. I was… babysitting,” he finally mutters.

Billy gives him an incredulous look. “Riiight,” he drawls, slow and sarcastic. “Sure you were.”

Harrington looks around. Passing glances and revolted stares meet him from their classmates. “I’ll be there,” he finally says.

Billy grins, feeling the high that only comes from knowing he’s won. “I’m looking forward to it… *King Steve*.”

The grin on his lips grows wider as he walks away. The crowd in the hallway parts for his every step. He feels Harrington’s eyes on his back. His steps are heavy. His pulse quickens, the darkness just barely kept at bay.

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Time seems to pass at a different speed until he’s shirtless and sweaty, a wrinkle on his forehead, feet moving on their own as he runs circles around Harrington, fighting for control of the ball.

Harrington, for his own credit, gives as much as he’s able in his condition.

Billy hisses, an obnoxious smirk on his lips when the ball swishes through the hoop yet again. Whoops of excitement ring around him from his teammates. He catches a high five from Jason. Vaguely, he hears the coach’s shout of dissatisfaction at the other team’s performance.

Harrington meets his eyes, an unsteady glare on his face. He’s tired, Billy can tell. His motions are slow and sluggish. His feet move at a pace that Billy knows isn’t up to his usual caliber. But he gives him credit for trying.

Tommy's got the ball now.

The whistle sounds and Billy's fists clench as his feet prepare for the hustle. His eyes are bright and open, ready for the ball.

Tommy passes to Jason who dribbles down the court. Harrington goes after him for an interception. He might have managed it if not for Josh knocking into him, sending him tumbling.

Billy sees it happen in slow motion. A harsh shoulder to the chest has Steve dropping to the floor. His head bounces off the ground when he lands, and the sound echoes in Billy's ears despite the distance between them.

There's a moment of eerie stillness when time seems to stop. He sees Steve lying on the ground, limbs spread like a rag doll. The coach is shouting, their classmates' voices a muffled haze as Billy takes in the sight of Harrington fallen and still.

"Aw, Harrington had a spill. Do you think the princess is okay?"

Maybe he should have left him alone.

But Billy finds himself by Steve's side, pushing others out of the way to get there first. He barely registers the pain as his bare knees hit the floor.

"Harrington!"

"Harrington!" The coach echoes behind him.

Other players crowd behind him, joining the huddle around the fallen player, but Billy's harsh elbow back gives him a bit of space.

He hears his own voice. *"Harrington, are you okay?"* It sounds far too concerned and unfamiliar to his own ears.

Steve groans softly. His eyes blink heavily, hazy and unfocused, and Billy sees all the events that lead up to this moment.

He sees himself, out of control. His own battered knuckles hitting bone, over and over. He hears the sound of the plate breaking over

the other man's head, and the force of every hit that came after. He feels the other man's body beneath his own. He sees the blood but he can't register the pain. He's shaking. Trembling. The fear hits him deep in his bones, in his *gut.* That he might have actually killed King Steve Harrington.

God, he wanted to hurt him. He wanted to hurt him so bad.

Steve's eyes are glassy and unseeing as he blinks.

Shit.

Billy groans at the memory and winces. His bruised knuckles throb. He tightens his grip around Harrington's shirt, shaking gently, silently begging for a response. A smart ass quip, an eye roll, *anything.* But he gets none. He feels the anger in his veins. He remembers the rage. The white-hot, uncontrollable rage. To hurt. To break. To destroy.

All of a sudden, the moment feels all too real.

And right then, he can be honest enough to admit to himself that he fucked up. He really fucked up. He could have killed the guy if not for Max having more balls than he'd ever given her credit for.

The moment stretches and feels like hours, as he stares down at glazed eyes.

"Harrington!"

Steve groans and blinks slowly.

"The dogs are gonna get you."

Billy's brow furrows in confusion. "What?" He snaps.

"Is he alright?" He hears the coach's voice behind him along with chuckles from Tommy and his teammates.

"Steve," he hisses and shakes his shoulder again, but only gets a soft murmur in response. The other man tries to rise.

“I got him,” Billy hears himself say. *“I got him.”*

He pulls the other man up, shifting as Steve sways and leans on him heavily. The others give them space as he gets them to their feet. He glares around angrily, daring any of the others to say a single word. Because even in these moments, he needs to be in control.

“Come on,” Billy says softly to Steve, pulling him along towards the locker room. “Practice is over,” he mutters.

Harrington looks far too pale when Billy sets him down on the bench between the lockers. Away from the others, they’re alone. It’s too quiet for Billy’s comfort.

But Harrington isn’t looking at him.

As Billy watches him, the remorse stings as it claws its way up violently within him. His hands are fisted by his sides, always so violent. It’s all he knows. His jaw is clenched so tight it’s painful. Absentmindedly, he rubs his knuckles, feeling the tender bruises that remain.

Without asking the other man, he opens his own locker and pulls out clean clothes, pushing them into Harrington’s face.

The other man stares at them blankly.

Like a terrible loop from a horror film, the scene plays in his head, over and over. His fists strike Harrington’s face. He couldn’t stop. The pain, the anger, the fear… it suffocated him. He couldn’t make it stop. Not until Max drove that needle into his neck.

Then it all stopped.

Billy lets out a heavy sigh and shifts. His hands tremble as they drop to his sides. Harrington sits, his head slightly bowed, messy hair falling into his face, looking like he might actually pass out where he sits.

“Alright, let’s get you out of here,” Billy mutters.

Billy kneels to the other man’s eye level. Steve looks up, almost like

he's seeing him for the first time. Billy's thumb traces circles over the other man's wrist, right over his pulse point. Then he grips the hem of his shirt, pulling it gently over his head with no resistance.

He carefully stuffs Harrington into his own clothes, silently thanking the gods that no one walks in to check on them.

"How do you feel?" Billy asks quietly.

"Hm," Harrington murmurs uselessly. "My head feels like a watermelon. A dying watermelon."

"Don't be dramatic, pretty boy."

"I'm not being dramatic," Steve mutters slowly. "I'm *concussed*. You fucking asshole."

"Baby," Billy quips, pulling him to his feet.

"I can walk," Steve insists shakily.

"Don't be stubborn," Billy growls.

He drags them out of the locker room. The warmth and closeness of Steve's body against his own has him missing the wild oblivion of his moments of rage. The violence is easier. The guilt and remorse… those are harder to manage.

Anger blazes bright within himself. Anger at his own actions. He terrifies himself, thinking about the blood that was on his hands.

He almost killed him. He might have, if he hadn't been stopped.

Maybe he is a monster.

But Harrington doesn't back away. He clings to him as Billy leads them out the door. He feels the dampness of the other man's hair against his neck. Their closeness leaves him trembling. His unsteady feet eventually bring them to the parking lot where he pushes Steve into the passenger seat of his banged up Camaro.

Billy watches him, taking advantage of a brief moment of freedom to

roam the other man's face with his eyes closed and his features still. He feels frozen in place. His grip is strong on Harrington's wrist-and he finds himself not wanting to let go.

Perhaps before, he could have denied himself the truth. He could believe his own insistence that he simply wanted to be king of this pathetic little high school in the middle of fuckville nowhere. He wanted to be the best, the *hottest,* the one with all the chicks and all the attention.

But as his eyes roam over Steve's bruised face, he knows the dreaded truth. The one that his dad tries daily to beat out of him.

And that terrifies him more than he'd like to admit.

Prince Charming. Pretty boy. The perfect prick with the doe-eyed girlfriend and the rich parents… the perfect life. Everything that he hated and *envied…* Every insult and jab to get Harrington's attention since he'd gotten into town.

In this moment, it's all too clear the motive behind them. It was all to get Harrington.

Feeling out of place is natural in a new town. But the problem is, Billy had always felt out of place. Like a nervous animal, he'd baited the popular boy. Pushed him, prodded him, antagonized him, like it might somehow make him feel better about himself.

A monster.

"I've fought worse monsters than you."

Billy freezes. "What?" He whispers. Did he hear that right? What did Harrington mean by that? His hands itch, trembling as he's frozen in place, wondering how to help without causing further damage.

But Harrington's eyes remain closed, and no more slurred words pass from his lips.

Billy lets out the heavy breath he'd been holding as he stands and carefully closes the passenger door.

He doesn’t say a word as he drives them to Harrington's house.

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The guilt weighs heavily in his gut as he drags the other man inside. His knuckles are white as he practically carries him through the door.

“Where the fuck is your room?” Billy growls as he looks around the place that seems like a mansion. It is-compared to the meager shithole he lives in. He takes them upstairs at Steve’s silent wave.

The house is thankfully deserted when Billy opens the door to what must be Steve’s bedroom. He carefully takes a step into the room. This isn’t exactly how he imagined this moment going in his wet dreams.

A moment of terror strikes him before he pulls them towards the bed. He lets out an unsteady breath as he pulls the covers back on the bed. Steve mumbles something incoherent as Billy carefully lays him onto the sheets, lowering him onto his side.

Warm, brown eyes glare up at him hazily. “What the hell are you staring at?” Steve mumbles. “Can’t get enough of this pretty face?”

Billy stares at the bruises that litter his cheeks, the cut lip and the black eyes. “Not lookin’ so pretty right now, Harrington,” he says softly, lying through his teeth.

For a moment, he forgets to move his hands away. One of them drifts up and buries itself in Steve’s unruly hair. He jerks it back like he’d been burned. But Harrington doesn’t seem to notice.

“Can you get me some aspirin?” Steve murmurs, his eyes fighting to stay open.

“Where?” Billy manages hoarsely.

“Bathroom.”

Billy pulls himself away. His eyes flicker until he’s able to tear his gaze away. But he goes. He pulls himself back from what he admits is a comfort and keeps his hands clenched by his sides.

There's medicine in the bathroom cabinet, and he grabs the bottle along with a glass that he fills with water from the sink.

He takes a trembling, unsteady breath as he stares at his reflection in the mirror.

He knows what he did. He knows his strength and the force behind those hits. He knows what they represent and he knows why he did it. Why he wanted to see Harrington suffer for the pain that he felt that night. It was easier to take it out on someone else. Steve, especially. Easier to fight and to rage and to see blood on another face than to simply admit to himself his own faults. His own *disgusting* faults. He knows what he did.

There's no comfort for that.

And when he goes back into Harrington's room, reaches out a hand with a small pill and a glass of water that the other man graciously accepts, he trembles as he watches him.

"Thanks," Steve says softly.

Billy silently pulls the covers over him as he settles his head onto the pillow. He wonders if he should call the other man's parents. Leave a note, perhaps? Certainly, he shouldn't be left alone in his condition. He knows the dangers of concussions, but his nervousness fades just a bit as he watches the other man sleep.

He swallows and remembers his rage.

"I'm sorry."

Steve doesn't hear him. And Billy's not even sure if he wanted him to.

He thinks he should leave. He has no right to be here. Not when he caused the trauma. When he's the reason for the damage.

Billy pauses in the doorway.

He gives him one last, steady glance. The other man sleeps peacefully on the bed.

Billy takes a shuddered breath as he turns away and rushes out of the house.

He practically jumps into the Camaro and speeds off with the roar of a loud engine and the screech of tires against asphalt.

This is it. This is his reality. Steve Harrington terrifies him.

And he can’t get away fast enough.

2. Chapter 2

Summary for the Chapter:

> Billy's met with a warning in school. Even an angry sister couldn't distract his thoughts from Harrington.

Harrington doesn’t show up at school the next day. Billy tries not to make it obvious that his eyes roam the hallways for that familiar mop of perfectly coiffed hair. The guy’s just taking the day off to recuperate. Not a big deal. Nothing’s wrong, he tells himself.

He refuses to let the worry show. He's got to keep the arrogant, hot-headed mask on his face. But a nagging feeling gnaws in his gut, giving him no peace. He sighs and rubs his forehead as he turns the corner on his way to class.

In the midst of his distraction, Nancy Wheeler strides up to him.

He stumbles jarringly to a stop when the girl steps directly into his path. But he recovers quickly with a haughty glare.

“What do you want, Wheeler?” He growls, definitely not on edge because Harrington’s ex-girlfriend suddenly wants to talk when she hadn’t uttered a word to him since his arrival in town.

Somehow she doesn’t seem intimidated. “I know what you did to Steve,” she says, her voice stern in a way that reminds him too much of the way his mother reprimanded him as a child.

Behind her, Jonathan Byers leans anxiously against the lockers, ready to intercede if needed.

Billy scoffs, an arrogant smirk on his lips. “I don’t know what you’re talking about, Wheeler.” He shrugs casually, refusing to let even a hint of guilt falter his mask.

“Stay the hell away from him.”

Billy swallows, uncomfortably aware that they’re getting stray looks from their fellow classmates. “What the fuck do you care? You’re not

his girlfriend anymore," he nods his head towards Byers. "Don't you and your freak boyfriend have better things to do?"

"Steve's a good guy," Nancy says, her voice low as she glares daggers at him. "And he doesn't need someone like you fucking his life up."

Billy keeps his gaze resolutely casual. "Does Harrington know his little princess is saying such kind words on his behalf? I didn't realize he needed a bitch to stand up for him."

Nancy bites her lip. She doesn't back down. If someone held a gun to his head, he'd admit that the princess has more gall than her slender appearance would suggest.

"You don't scare me."

Billy smirks, tilting his head to side. His lewd glance down her front makes a muscle twitch in her cheek. "Is that so?"

She takes a step closer to him. "There are things that keep me up at night," she says, her voice low and dangerous. Her nostrils flare as he glares at her, and she glowers back with everything she's got. "There are monsters in the dark that terrify me. But you? You're nothing. You're just a sad little boy who feels better by making others feel small." She shakes her head, looking at him as if he were a bug under her shoe. "You're *nothing*, Billy Hargrove."

Billy stares, his breath hitching in his throat as she takes a step back.

"Stay the hell away from Steve."

She turns on her heel and walks away, books held under her arm like a good little school girl. Byers barely spares him a glance as he follows her retreat like a dog.

Billy shudders a heavy breath as he watches them go. He growls, anger flooding his veins. He's only just lost them in the crowd of students before he turns and throws his fist into the closest locker. He hisses at the pain in his cracked knuckles as the dent left in the metal mocks him in all his pathetic agony.

There are gasps and stares all around him.

He ignores them all.

~

Despite how he tries to tell himself he doesn't give a flying rat's ass, Billy looks around the parking lot for Harrington's car. The familiar maroon Beemer worth more than his parent's shit house sits parked in the same spot that it was left the day before.

Billy chews on his bottom lip, looking around aimlessly before sighing at his own miserable self-pity. He's definitely not thinking about Harrington. And he's definitely not going to drive to the guy's house to check on him. How did this pretty boy turn him into a pathetic pining vat of self-hatred? Harrington invades his thoughts like an infection. A sickness. His father would throw a fit if he knew.

He strides across the parking lot towards his Camaro.

Tommy grins at him as he walks past, reaching out to tap his arm. "Hey, dude! A bunch of us are gonna-"

"Fuck off," he spits harshly. He doesn't bother to appear amicable. It's all bullshit anyway. A shit head like Tommy isn't worth his time. From the moment the guy glommed onto him, jumping onto his new popularity, Billy knew the guy was a piece of shit.

He only tolerated it because Tommy had a grudge against Harrington. And it was always about Harrington.

He pulls out of the parking with the harsh screech of tires, rock music blasting through the speakers. Though he doesn't turn in the direction that would take him to rich boy's house. He turns left and slows down as he pulls into the pick up lane of Hawkins Middle.

He searches out a familiar head of red hair, turning down the music as he approaches.

Max's eyes narrow when she sees him pull up next to her.

"Where're you going?" He calls out through the open passenger window.

“None of your business,” she says gruffly. “I thought I told you to leave me alone.”

Billy sighs, his breath stuttering in his throat as he leans further across the center console. “I’m your brother,” he says carefully. “It is my business.”

She stares at him like he grew another head.

“I’m going to the arcade,” she finally states.

Billy pauses. “With your friends?” He asks, his voice softer.

Max raises an eyebrow, daring him to protest.

“Do you want a ride?” He asks reluctantly.

Max squares her shoulders as she glares. “Fuck no,” she spits. “I’d rather walk.”

Billy waits until she’s stormed away from his car before his shoulders drop and he sags against the seat, feeling like he can’t breathe.

~

A miserable night of weight-lifting and chain-smoking fades into a dull morning, tracing familiar steps in the shit school of a town he feels trapped in.

A welcome voice in his ear stifles his motions as he trades books in his locker.

“Hey.”

A brief moment of relief lightens the tension in his chest when he sees Harrington standing by his side. His heart leaps into his throat. It’s a mirror of their moment just two days before. Billy tries not to get too worked up over it.

“Lookin’ better, Harrington.” The other man’s eyes are a bit brighter. The bruises have faded a bit.

Steve shrugs awkwardly. “Yeah. I feel better.”

Billy cocks his head to the side. “What do you want?”

Harrington shifts on his feet before he responds. “Um, look my memory’s a bit hazy, but… I just wanted to say… I appreciate what you did the other day. You know… taking me home and all?”

Determinedly, Billy keeps a smirk on his face. “Don’t mention it, Harrington. You were a bit out of it. I just wanted to get you into bed,” he leers with a wink.

Steve stares for a moment before he finds the words to speak. “Right,” he says uncomfortably.

“Don’t get used to any special treatment, *King Steve*,” he scoffs. “I’m just here to take you down a few notches.”

There’s a tense moment of silence between them before Steve sighs and shakes his head. “Why do you have to be such a dick?”

The blunt disappointment leaves Billy frozen in place. The ache in his chest shudders heavily as the other man moves to leave.

“Whatever,” Harrington mumbles as he lets out a tired sigh. “I just wanted to say thanks. Fuck me for tryin’, right?”

His lungs feel choked for air. The other man is already walking away when Billy grits his name through his teeth. *“Harrington.”*

Steve sighs again as he turns back. “What?” He asks wearily.

Billy bites his lip. The hardest part is meeting Steve’s gaze. He can’t quite read his face and the terror of the moment hits him where it hurts. “What are you doing after school?” He finally asks.

Steve frowns. “Fuck if I know,” he mutters. “Working on the project for Benson’s class?” He adjusts the strap of the bag over his shoulder and gives him a suspicious look. “Why?”

Billy breathes heavily. “You wanna hang?” He asks softly.

Steve's gaze softens. "Honestly… I could use a drink."

He feels the stress drain from his shoulders. He grins gently as the atmosphere between them lightens. "You sure you should be drinkin' in your condition?"

Steve laughs softly. "Thanks for the concern, but I think I can handle it."

"I'm not carrying your ass home again."

Steve gives him a searching look and finally smiles. "Meet me by the quarry after school. Four o'clock. I'll bring the drinks."

Billy's mood somehow improves significantly afterwards.

~

Billy sits by the rocks, a cigarette hanging from his lips when Steve's car pulls up next to the Camaro. The calmness of the water does little to steady the thunder raging in his chest. But he thinks he hides his nervousness well.

"Where'd you get the beer, Harrington?" He asks as the other man sets a six pack of cans between them.

"Fred's."

"Fake ID?"

"Owner knows my dad."

Billy sneers as he pulls a can out of the six pack rings, helping himself. "Why am I not surprised? King Steve's got connections all over town."

"Fuck off," Harrington mutters as he cracks open his own can.

They settle quietly, an ample amount of space between them as they look over the water. Billy swallows a heavy gulp of beer. It tastes a lot better than any beer he'd had before. It's good shit.

How typical of the golden boy. Perfect King Steve with all the money and all the girls fawning over him. His whole perfect life handed to him on a silver platter. Billy struggles to keep the envy at bay.

“You come here often?”

“Not really,” Steve shrugs. “It’s nice though. Quiet.”

Billy scoffs. “I bet you bring tons of chicks out here. Don’t get any ideas, Harrington. I’m not gonna suck your cock like one of your sluts.”

“Don’t be a dick,” Steve mutters.

“Am I wrong?” Billy throws back, because hostility is all he’s ever known. “Oh wait, that’s right. I forgot. You don’t run the place anymore, not since I got to town,” he laughs cruelly. “Bitches not trippin’ over themselves to suck your dick anymore.”

“Why do you do that?” Steve grimaces, sending him a harsh glare. “I never… I never *ran* the place.”

Billy clicks his tongue. “Not what I heard, Harrington.”

“Well, you heard wrong. Maybe if you actually took the chance to get to know me, you’d see things differently.”

Billy swallows. “Why the fuck would I want to do that?” He mutters softly. “You turned bitch.” He sneers at him over his can. “And I only like bitches eager to suck my dick.”

Harrington’s glare is hard and steady. “Why are you so angry all the time?”

Billy freezes. That hits him in the gut. The question is pure torture. It makes him feel hollow… and scared. Less than. It makes him hate Harrington just a little bit more.

“They were never really my friends, you know?” Steve offers at his silence.

He looks away wordlessly, hoping the water would give him some

serenity that would steady the pulse in his chest. The beer helps. He takes another drink.

“Bunch of assholes,” Steve mutters. “And now you’ve taken them off my hands. Congratulations.” He bumps their cans together and Billy grits his teeth in frustration.

A moment passes before Steve speaks again. “Why’d you even want to hang out if you were just gonna be a dick about it?”

“Why did you agree?” Billy hisses back.

“Because…” Steve sighs and shrugs, his voice trailing off. “Because I thought there might be more to you,” he says honestly.

Billy frowns. “More?” He echoes.

“Yeah, more. I thought you might be *more* than just an asshole.” Steve mutters. “It’s not like I’ve got a ton of people I like to call my friends. Those guys… the ones I used to hang out with… they’re dicks because their lives are miserable. They liked me because of… the big house, the car, the money, the… I don’t fucking know what they saw in me-maybe they just hung out with me because I could get them booze every weekend. *Fuck.* I don’t know, maybe I was hoping you’d be different.”

Billy grimaces but can’t seem to bite his tongue. “Poor little rich boy and all his problems,” he sneers softly. “You tryin’ to make me feel sorry for you, Harrington?”

“Don’t put words in my mouth,” Steve mutters under his breath. “That’s not what I said.” He takes a slow breath and a drink. “Why do you do that?” He eventually asks after setting his can down.

“This town sucks,” Billy shrugs. “Gotta find something to do.”

“Yeah, you have no fucking idea,” Steve mutters.

“Something you’re not telling me, Harrington?”

Steve gives him a knowing glare. “Be grateful you don’t know.”

Billy watches him for a long moment as Steve's eyes trail along the water. It's a long moment before he can tear his eyes away to the scenery that he's loathed to admit isn't nearly as appealing.

"Sorry about your face," he eventually mutters.

Harrington looks at him with genuine surprise. "An actual apology," he jests. "From Billy Hargrove. Never thought I'd see the day."

"Don't get used to it," Billy growls, but there's a hint of a smile that tugs at the corners of his lips. "Maybe your life isn't so perfect," he says casually. It's a welcome thought that he and *King Steve* might actually have something in common.

"Not even close."

"Are we having a real heart-to-heart, Harrington?"

"Isn't that why you're here?" Steve turns to him with a grin. "You know, I'm kind of getting tired of you walloping on me," he jokes lightly.

Billy scoffs and straightens stiffly. "Just wanted to see King Steve the golden boy taken down a notch or two."

Harrington studies his face silently, and Billy nervously shuffles under the heaviness of the gaze.

"I don't believe you," Steve finally says.

Billy sneers. "Come on, admit it. The princess running off with the school freak. That's gotta hurt."

"Don't call him that."

He raises a disbelieving eyebrow. He can't for the life of him understand what Wheeler sees in the older Byers brother. She dumps the popular guy for the school pariah? He thought she was supposed to be smart.

"He's been through things that would make you shit your pants," Steve says lowly. "You don't get to talk shit on that."

Billy shrugs. A lost brother that turned up fine a week later? Sounds like a regular fucked up suburban family to him.

“Kind of makes you rethink your own perfect home life, huh, pretty boy?”

Steve shakes his head. “Never said my life was perfect.”

Billy raises an eyebrow, but he lets the other man continue. “Trouble in paradise?” He goads after a moment of silence.

“Just…” Steve lets out a heavy breath as his head drops back. “Just feeling a bit lost lately, I guess.

“King Steve at a loss,” Billy mocks.

“Why do you do that?” Steve asks, but there’s a small grin on his lips that causes a flutter in Billy's chest. “Give me shit all the time? King Steve this and King Steve that. It’s getting kind of old.”

“Maybe I’m just jealous,” Billy admits. He can’t blame it on the alcohol, he’s only had one beer. It must be the view. “The perfect little golden boy, who’s had everything handed to him on a silver platter.”

“What, so I don’t get the right to complain?”

A familiar anger rises in him. “No,” he growls through his teeth. “No, you don’t.”

Steve crushes his empty can between his hands and reaches for the pack. He grabs another and holds it out. Billy silently takes it from his hands.

“My parents are alright,” Steve admits. “Just lonely, I guess. They’re not around much. But… all things considered… they’re alright.”

Billy’s hands tremble as he downs half of his fresh beer instead of offering a response.

“You know, you pick on me like a kid pulling on some girl’s pigtails on the playground,” Steve laments casually. “If I didn’t know better,

I'd say you've got a bit of a crush on me."

"Lightweight," Billy growls at him. "You must be missing that bitch Wheeler more than I thought."

"Don't be crude."

"Did you love her?" Billy asks carefully.

"Yeah," Steve eventually says after a slow drink. "Yeah, I did. I still do."

Billy tries not to acknowledge the jealousy he feels in his gut. The feeling makes him want to hurl and he knows it's not because of the beer.

"Must make you angry, right?"

Steve shrugs. "At first, sure."

Billy turns to him. "But not anymore?" He asks curiously.

"She doesn't love me," Steve says simply. "You can't make someone fall in love with you. And as much as I want her to… I… I just want her to be happy. If Jonathan makes her happy, then-"

"The freak?" Billy asks incredulously. He can't comprehend why Wheeler would choose that son of a bitch over Steve. They're a pair of perfect idiots now.

And yet Steve is head over heels, hung up over this nerdy, brainiac moron.

You can't make someone fall in love with you.

The words echo in his head. Like driving a spike into his heart.

"What's so great about this girl?" Billy finally asks. "If you ask me, you could do a lot better. A chick with bigger tits for sure."

"Goddamnit, you are such an asshole!" Steve punches him in the arm as Billy bursts out with obnoxious laughter.

Steve grins softly as they quietly settle.

“She special,” he says as his eyes glaze and he gazes out at nothing. “She listens,” he adds after a moment. “She… she knows me, I guess. I know that sounds dumb, but… that’s how it felt when we were together.”

“She *knows* you?” Billy echoes, raising a skeptical eyebrow. “Sounds gay, Harrington.”

“Yeah,” Steve mutters softly, rolling his eyes. “And she wanted someone else.”

“That doesn’t make you mad?” Billy growls. “That doesn’t piss you off?”

“Well, sure I’m mad,” Steve shrugs. “I mean, I was angry, at first. But… I don’t know, man, it feels like I don’t even know who I am half the damn time… I can’t really blame her, you know?”

No. Billy doesn’t understand. He doesn’t get it. “Sounds like you’re having an identity crisis,” he mutters, shaking his head.

“No worse than you,” Steve quips. “Is that why you wanted to hang out?” He asks, looking up at him.

Billy hesitates. He swallows the lump in his throat. “I’m nothing like you,” he finally says.

Harrington doesn’t believe him. “Why are you so angry all the time?” He repeats his earlier question. “Must be exhausting.”

“I like it,” Billy growls, his voice steely and dangerous. “I *like* being angry. People piss me off and I get to break things.”

“Like my face?” Steve raises his eyebrows. The fading black eyes glint painfully in the orange light of the setting sun. “Dude, you gotta find a better way to release your frustrations.”

Billy thinks about the skateboard held together with duct tape sitting in his sister’s room.

“What the fuck am I supposed to do?” Billy spits. He scoffs and shakes his head in frustration. “We can’t all be like you, pretty boy.”

Steve snorts and looks away. He takes a drink and Billy steals the opportunity to study him. He watches the way Steve’s adam’s apple bobs when he swallows. His stomach turns over in his gut.

“What do you do, huh?” Billy asks, his voice rough as he tries to dispel the silence. “When you get angry… what does King Steve do?”

“I get angry,” Steve says softly, his eyes drop to his lap.

“Yeah? And?”

“And… and I bullshit, apparently.” He lets out a bit of a self-deprecating laugh as he stares out into the water. “I don’t fucking know… I just… pretend like it’s not real.”

Silence follows.

“I get scared too.” Steve shrugs and picks up a pebble, forcefully chucking it into the water. “I just… ignore it… ignore all of it until I can’t anymore. Coward’s way out, I guess.

“You get scared,” Billy scoffs in disbelief.

“Of course I do.”

They don’t speak for a while. Billy doesn’t know what to say in response. And apparently, Steve has nothing more to say on the subject. They sit quietly, drinking their beers, watching as the sun slowly sets on the horizon.

Neither of them thought suffering the other’s company would be as easy as it is.

The chill in the air grows harsher. Billy finishes his last beer and turns to the other man. He reaches over and presses his thumb into the cut on Harrington’s lip.

“Hey, fuck off!” Steve gasps. But there’s a grin on his lips that must hurt when it stretches the cut.

“Pretty boy,” Billy chuckles. “You look better with your face beaten and bruised. More like a man.”

“Fucker,” Steve mutters under his breath. He glances at his watch and sighs at the time. “I gotta head out.”

Billy’s heart sinks in his chest, knowing that it’s about time he head home himself.

Steve slowly climbs to his feet, groaning at sore joints cracking from being in the same position for too long. “You can fix it, you know,” he offers, staring down at the other man who had yet to move.

Billy freezes, painfully aware of how he must look like a deer caught in the headlights. “W-what?”

“With Max,” Steve says softly. “I know she’s pissed at you, but… make an effort. Show her you’re more than *just* a douchebag. She’ll come around.”

“What the fuck do you know, Harrington?” Billy lets the anger seep into his voice.

“Whatever,” Steve shrugs and shakes his head. “I’m just tryin’ to help, dude.”

“Well, don’t.”

Steve nods, wiping his palms against the denim on his thighs. “Noted,” he says tersely. “I’ll see you in school tomorrow.”

He picks up their empties and walks away before Billy has the chance to formulate a response.

Steve’s driven off and gone before Billy realizes the only thought in his head is perhaps Harrington might be the most special thing that’s walked into his life since he showed up in Hawkins, Indiana.

3. Chapter 3

Summary for the Chapter:

> Life goes on for Steve after his experience in the upside-down. He doesn't think much can shock him now. It turns out, he's wrong on two fronts.

“You give shit advice, Harrington.”

Steve looks up just in time for a hand to roughly smack into his shoulder, courtesy of the new resident douchebag, Billy Hargrove. He groans at the sight of him, wondering what god he pissed off to have the guy bothering him in the library of all places. “What the hell, dude?” He mutters as the other man sits down in the empty seat next to him, uninvited.

“Max,” Billy hisses under his breath, like someone around them might overhear. Considering old Mrs. Lieberman, the librarian is already giving them disgruntled glaces, Steve thinks he should be keeping his voice down anyway.

“I bought her a new skateboard.”

Steve blinks and raises his eyebrows expectantly.

“Because I broke hers,” Billy says slowly, like Steve is an idiot for not catching on sooner.

Steve snorts. Of course Billy broke his sister’s skateboard. “In a fit of rage?” He asks dryly.

“I found it in the trash this morning,” Billy says through gritted teeth. “You can fix it, just *fix it,”* he mimics in a high-pitched voice that sounds nothing like Steve. “Whole lotta good that did me. Thanks for the shit advice, Harrington.”

“How is this my fault?” Steve asks incredulously. “You’re the one who acted like an asshole!”

Billy glowers and looks away, his bad temper rearing its ugly head

again. Steve would almost feel bad for him if he weren't completely exasperated by the man who, just a week ago, pummeled his face into the ground. "How the hell am I supposed to *fix it?"* Billy growls at him.

Mrs. Lieberman shushes them loudly from behind the circulation desk.

Steve sees the anger flare in the other man's eyes at the elderly woman. He flushes in panic and acts quickly, leaning over to catch his attention before Billy decides to make a scene. "Have you tried… oh, I don't know… apologizing?"

Billy turns to him and makes a face like he'd rather chew on glass. "She doesn't want an apology from me," he mutters, his voice low and-do Steve's ears deceive him, a bit dejected?

But Steve shrugs. He can't really blame her. "And what about Lucas?" He asks carefully.

Billy glances around dismissively. "What *about* him?"

"Don't you think maybe you owe him an apology too?" Steve says slowly.

"Nah," Billy snorts under his breath. "Fuck that kid."

"No, no," Steve argues, shaking his head. "No, not fuck that kid. That *kid* did nothing wrong. You're the psycho son of a bitch who attacked a thirteen year old!"

Mrs. Lieberman sends them another shush that has them both grimacing in their seats.

"What the hell is your problem with him anyway?" Steve whispers, dropping his gaze as he pretends to be preoccupied with his books.

"He should stay away from my sister," Billy says, his voice low and dangerous. "Because I fucking said so."

"Look, is this because of what I think it is? Because being a dick is one thing, being a *racist* dick-"

“It’s not that!” Billy protests.

Steve stares at him in disbelief. He sighs softly, baffled and tired. “Then what is it?”

Billy looks away. His shoulders seem to tense even further, if possible, and Steve wonders if he’s actually about to gain insight on what makes Billy Hargrove tick.

“Why should she get to be happy?” The other man finally mutters.

Steve blinks. Eyes wide, he shifts to fully glare at him because the other man can’t possibly be *that* much of a douchebag. “Are you serious?” He whispers.

But Billy has been incensed and he’s not planning on stopping. “Why should she get to make friends?” He hisses at him. “This place is misery and *torture* in a nutshell. Neither of us wanted to come here. And now she’s… hanging out with those kids. She’s…” He swallows the lump in his throat before he continues. “She’s actually… found a reason to not be miserable here, and I just… I…”

Steve stares, jaw dropped as his head tilts to the side in bewilderment. “Are you jealous?” He asks softly. Shock seeps into his voice as he carefully considers the other man. He’d laugh if it weren’t so sad.

“Hell no!” Billy says harshly. “I’m not fucking jealous, I’m…”

Lonely.

Steve lets it stay unspoken between them. Never in a million years had he considered being a real friend to Billy Hargrove. He certainly never thought they might actually have something in common. Not that he would ever admit it out loud.

“Why should she be so fucking happy here?” Billy mutters when Steve doesn’t speak.

“Because she deserves to be,” Steve tells him softly.

The difference between them is that Steve’s never had to uproot his

life. He doesn't know what it's like to feel out of place, to hate the hand he's been dealt. His dreams of the future had always been so simple. And so seemingly attainable. Meet the right girl, settle down, live a good long, prosperous life. Having life flipped upside down has a dual meaning for him.

Steve sighs slowly, trying to articulate whatever it is that he means to say. "Look… I know this town sucks, but… you're both here, and you might as well make it manageable by being a civil human being."

Shrewd blue eyes study him. The moment drags on and Steve finds himself unable to read the other man's expression.

"Fuck," Billy eventually mutters.

Steve breaks their gaze and turns back to his books. "Yeah." His voice is resolute as he's determined to turn his focus back on his studies until his free period is over. It's still weird having a conversation with the other man that doesn't involve Billy making asshole comments to him. He can't shake the feeling that there's some piece to the puzzle that he's missing. At a loss, he finds himself preferring to keep to himself rather than risk getting his face pounded again by the other man's unpredictable behavior. A now familiar throbbing returns between his temples.

"What, that's it?" Billy asks incredulously, his eyes boring into him.

"What more do you want me to say?" Steve whispers as his eyes narrow. "I'm not here to hold your hand while you try to act like a human being!"

Billy meets his hard gaze with as much calmness as he can muster.

Steve grimaces as he turns away, his stomach rolling painfully in his gut. "You fucked up. No one can tell you how to fix it."

The air is tense around them. Steve's eyes are firmly planted on his textbook, not taking in a single word of it.

A moment later, the other man is gone and he finds himself alone once again.

~

Steve would be lying if he said he wasn't worried about basketball practice the next day. He doesn't know what version of Billy Hargrove he might encounter. The guy who baits him with disparaging comments, the guy who loses all good sense and throws wild fists in his rage, or the Billy who reveals rare moments resembling *something* like insecurity.

But Billy simply plays the game. He still runs circles around him across the court. Steve gives his all and manages to make a few baskets. But physically, he's still not at a hundred percent. Their team leaves a lot to be desired, something that Tommy reminds him of at every given opportunity.

Billy, on the other hand, shocks him with his amicable maturity.

He can't quite put into words the change between them.

When Billy steals the ball from him yet again, in a what Steve is loathed to admit is an impressive performance, the ball swooshes through the hoop once more, amidst cheers and shouts, and Billy turns to him, a leering grin, tongue out, as he smirks… there's something light and good-natured in his eyes that has Steve preparing for the next bout, as opposed to stewing in his frustration.

The game goes on until coach blows the whistle. Billy even pats him on the back as they head towards the locker room.

"Maybe one day you'll actually be able to catch up to me, Harrington," he goads, grin spread wide on his face.

Steve pants, still catching his breath. He's surprised to find the other man in as good a mood as he's in, especially after their conversation the day before, but he knows better than to point it out.

Wordlessly, they strip of their sweaty gym clothes, grab their towels, and head towards the showers.

"Still a bit off your game today, I see," Billy quips casually, taking the shower head beside him. "Still recovering, or are you just getting soft on me, Harrington?"

“Nah, I’m just a fucking idiot for feeding your ego,” Steve drawls as he focuses his attention on shampooing the sweat and grime out of his hair. “Don’t want to emasculate the new guy in town. You can thank my mother for my manners.”

Billy chuckles loudly. “Keep tellin’ yourself that, pretty boy.”

“Yeah, pretty boy,” Tommy goads, echoing Billy like a pathetic leech.

Steve looks at him, unimpressed. In the year since his falling out with Tommy, he had yet to acknowledge the other man’s antagonistic behavior towards him. He doesn’t want to give him the satisfaction of letting it get to him. But it’s a small town and an even smaller school. They still run in the same circles. But Tommy will never let him forget that he chose bookish princess Nancy over him.

Today though-and the very last thing he expects-Billy beats him to a retort.

“Hey, why don’t you fuck off?”

Tommy freezes, the awful smile dropping from his lips. “What?”

Steve stares in shock as well. His eyes shift wearily between the two, sensing a pending physical confrontation.

“You heard me.” Billy looks him dead in the eyes. “Carol’s been more of a bitch lately than usual. I’d tell you to take care of it, but from where I’m standing, you have more dick in your personality than you do between your legs.”

Steve’s eyebrows nearly shoot into his hairline. He bites his lip hard, struggling to stifle a laugh at the look on Tommy’s face.

Billy smirks, daring the smaller man to speak.

After a moment, Tommy scoffs. He turns off his water and walks off like a dog with his tail between his legs.

Steve shakes his head, a small grin still on his lips. “Why did you do that?”

“No one gets to give you shit but me, Harrington.”

He swallows. His heart leaps when he realizes Billy had taken a step closer to him. “Still just ‘Harrington’, huh?” He asks softly. The other man only grins in response. Their closeness is somehow disturbing and pleasant at the same time. He doesn’t miss the way Billy’s eyes rake down his front, making him feel uncomfortably exposed. The other man smirks as he leers at him. He gives him a wink before shutting off his own water. He grabs his towel and walks away, leaving Steve at a loss for words, shampoo falling into his eyes.

The spell breaks and Steve puts his head back under the spray.

He doesn’t think more of the incident. He’s used to ignoring Billy’s weird quirks by now.

~

The rest of his day passes normally. It’s a wonder that he can remain so calm after the insane events of the past week. Sometimes Steve thinks something might be missing inside him that allows him to continue living his life like normal. After Barb. After the monsters. But life moves on around him and he moves on too. Only rare moments of introspection leave him feeling like the rest of the world is now moving at a different pace. Like he’s just… slightly off track. And try as he might, he can’t quite catch up.

The last bell rings and Steve makes his way to the parking lot. He promised Dustin he would take him to his dentist appointment since Mrs. Henderson is working. This is one change in his life that he’s thankful for. He’s got a fondness for the kid, something that took himself by surprise.

It’s nice though, having someone to look after who, in return, looks up to him with admiration that one would have for an older sibling.

He’s looking out the window as he waits, his car parked in the pick up lane of Hawkins Middle, when he hears his passenger door open. But he straightens in shock when it’s not Dustin he sees, but Max, sliding easily into the passenger seat.

“Whoa, what are you doing?!” He looks around wildly like someone might think he’s kidnapping a middle schooler.

“I wanna talk to you.”

She sounds mildly annoyed and Steve frowns in confusion. He glances around at the horde of middle schoolers leaving the building, looking for a head of curly hair hidden under a familiar hat. “What? Where’s Dustin? I’m supposed to be picking up Dustin.”

Max rolls her eyes. “Mr. Clarke had to show them something cool and… nerdy probably. He said he’ll be right out. But I wanted to talk to you in private,” she insists firmly.

“Why?” He asks suspiciously. “What’s up?”

Max crosses her arms before she speaks. “Have you been talking to Billy?”

Steve grimaces and rubs the back of his neck. He should have seen this coming. “Yeah,” he finally admits.

“Why?” Max stares at him in disbelief. “Why would you do that?”

“I… I don’t know,” Steve says honestly. “He’s been… surprisingly amicable lately, I guess.”

“He’s an asshole,” Max says flatly. “He almost killed you, you know. He would have, if it weren’t for me. So you’re welcome. You should hate his guts.”

“Yeah, I know,” Steve mutters as he looks away. “I know. But lately, he’s… he hasn’t been that bad.” He groans when he hears the words with his own ears, *knowing* how absurd it comes across.

Max throws up her arms as she gapes at him.

“I mean, once you get past… you know, the asshole parts,” he adds quickly.

“I don’t get it.” She lets out a hollow laugh as Steve turns to her. “I mean, what can you possibly see in him that’s worth even a

conversation?"

"Max," Steve says softly. "What is this about?"

She looks away and Steve sighs slowly. He watches as she wrings her hands in her lap. Carefully, she meets his gaze again. "He showed up at Lucas' house yesterday," she finally mutters.

The blood drains from Steve's face. "Oh god, what did he do?"

But Max shakes her head angrily. "He said he was sorry," she snaps. "He actually apologized to him, like that makes a difference. He said… he said it was fine if we kept hanging out, as if I need his permission!"

Steve's shoulders drop as the momentary panic fades away. "Well, that… that doesn't sound terrible?" He admits, much to Max's annoyance. "I mean, I was afraid… you know. It's Billy!"

"He's an asshole," Max snarls. "He's always been an asshole to me, ever since the day our parents married. If he thinks this is going to make up for all of it-"

"No. No, Max," Steve says quickly. "No one is saying this makes it okay-"

"Then why is he doing it?"

"I…" Steve's voice trails off. How could anyone be expected to understand the reasoning behind Billy Hargrove's actions? "I think… he's just trying to be better," he finally says. "Is that really so bad? Is it so bad that he's trying?"

Max remains stubbornly quiet.

"He actually apologized for breaking my face," Steve offers. "God, I thought hell would freeze over before Billy Hargrove admits he made a mistake."

Max gives him an unreadable expression. "So what?" She asks softly. "You're over it? Just like that?"

“No, not just like that.” Steve shakes his head. But the truth is, he’s not exactly mad about it. Not as mad as he should be, anyway. It seems to be a pattern for him, lately. “I mean… I don’t know. It seems like he’s trying. That’s all I’m saying.”

“Am I supposed to just get over it, too?”

“No one’s saying you’re supposed to do anything,” Steve offers gently. “He fucked up. Let him grovel and beg and…” He lets out a soft laugh when Max rolls her eyes. “Let *him* figure it out.”

Eventually Max nods, and Steve counts that as a win.

“You okay?” He asks after a moment of silence. “I know we don’t really know each other that well. But, if there’s anything you need… You can say anything to me.”

Max slowly glances at him. “Yeah?”

“Yeah.”

A wry smile pulls at her lips. “I think I get what Dustin sees in you.”

“Oh, god,” Steve laments dramatically as he groans. How did he become this person? And what embarrassing things has Dustin been saying about him behind his back?

Max chuckles at his reaction and they both turn away, trying to hide their smiles.

Steve is thinking it’s about time Dustin shows up, or he’s going to be late for his appointment when Max speaks again.

“Can I ask you something?”

“Go for it,” he says distractedly as his eyes search the crowd of rowdy students.

Max swallows. There’s a flicker of something unreadable in her expression. “You were going out with Mike’s sister, right? Nancy?”

Oh, *Nancy*. “Yeah?” Steve says, as casually as he can.

“Mike told me you two were together for a while.”

“About a year, give or take…” The best fucking year of his life.

“So…”

Steve stares blankly. *Max, where are you goin’ with this?*

“So, you are into girls.”

Steve blinks. That’s not what he was expecting to hear. “Of course I am!” He sputters incredulously. As if there were an alternative! “What? *What?* Why would you ask that-”

“Never mind.” Max says quickly, clearly eager to backtrack. “Forget I said anything.”

“What?!” Steve bursts, his head spinning in circles.

“Just forget I said anything!” Max shakes her head. “I should go.”

“Where are you going?” He demands hoarsely. “Where’s Dustin?”

But Max is already out the car. The door slams harshly and Steve finds himself leaning over the center console to shout after her. “Wait, why did you ask me that? Why did you-*Max*!”

He slumps back in his seat, baffled and appalled.

Max’s question rattles around in his head. Why on earth would she ask that?

And then it hits him.

The pieces fall together.

Billy. The looks, the touches, every single obscene glance he’d given him… He remembers every single fucking time Billy’s goddamn tongue licked his lips as he stared at him like he’s a meal and Billy’s a starving man.

No one gets to give you shit but me, Harrington.

The man is acting like an obnoxious schoolboy with a crush.

Billy Hargrove is a queer.

Holy shit.

Well, fuck.

4. Chapter 4

Summary for the Chapter:

> Steve can't get Billy Hargrove off his mind. He can't seem to evade the guy either.

Steve spends an hour that evening staring at his *Sports Illustrated Swimsuit* poster of the gorgeous Christie Brinkley taped up on his wall. The blonde bombshell with beach blown hair and a skimpy white bikini riding high around her waist had been the star of multiple fantasies during the height of his sexual enlightenment.

A beautiful woman, soft in all the right places… he's spent dozens of nights jerking off to Christie Brinkley. Who wouldn't?

He doesn't fucking get it.

Of all the guys he'd suspected of being queer, Billy Hargrove is the last on the list.

Billy drives a fast car, is dreadfully athletic, and has all the hottest girls in their school drooling over his ass… and he'd rather rubs dicks together with some dude rather than take his pick of any girl he wants. It's fucking absurd.

Steve's heard all about the queers in California. Dudes running around the streets half-naked, prancing about with their rainbow flags, proclaiming their proudness of their unconventional lifestyle… the thought had never struck any emotion in him other than disgust. But now, now he's more… curious than anything else. Perhaps a bit confused, as well.

Billy's from California. He's got the natural tan going for him, unlike the models Steve stares at, knowing they're probably covered in tanning oil, which only makes them more appealing. But Billy is the very definition of masculine. A douchebag through and through. Gruff and threatening, probably overcompensating, he realizes, now that Steve's got this new information rattling around in his head.

He just never expected it to be a guy like Billy.

Steve thinks of Nancy, with her soft hair that smells like coconut shampoo, and a gentle smile that would always cause a flutter in his chest. She was small and delicate under his palms. Thinking of their intimate moments still gets his motor running. She's fucking beautiful, with a heart of gold to boot. Everything he's ever wanted.

Why would Billy go for another dude over that? Maybe something just got hardwired wrong in him.

Steve knows how dangerous this piece of information is. He could ruin the guy, easily. And maybe a part of him thinks Billy deserves it, the fucking shithead, who's caused him more than a mild migraine. But he's got enough compassion at least, to know this is something he should probably keep to himself.

This guy might be the worst thing to ever walk into his life. Steve spends the whole weekend agonizing over Billy Hargrove.

Monday morning is still a mess because of it. His mind is jumbled and anxious as he walks towards the school from his car. Unfortunately for him, a moment of peace just doesn't seem to be in the cards.

"Harrington!"

Steve freezes at the familiar voice. He curses silently to himself and turns around to see Billy strolling up to him in the parking lot.

"Hey, pretty boy," the other man drawls, stopping a few feet away, typical obnoxious smirk on his lips.

Steve squirms under his gaze. Uncomfortably, he adjusts the strap of his bag over his shoulder. "Hey," he mutters quietly, looking away.

"You look weird," Billy tells him, scrutinizing him with furrowed brows.

Steve doesn't quite meet his eyes. It's too strange now. He can't help but think about all the details he never cared for before. The other man's stance, the shape of his lips, the glare of his gaze… What the

fuck is Billy thinking about when he leers at him the way he does?

And what the hell is Steve supposed to do about it?

Billy gives him a strange look at his silence.

“The fuck is wrong with you, Harrington?”

“I-I gotta get to class.” Steve points towards the building and awkwardly gives him a nod before he makes a hasty exit. It probably would have worked better for him if it wasn’t plain knowledge that the first bell wouldn’t ring for another twenty minutes.

He groans to himself once he’s away. It’s like he’s forgotten what subtlety means. But he can’t act normal around the other man. He doesn’t even know what normal is anymore. Not with Billy, not with… *anything,* it seems. But he does know what dangerous territory is. And that’s what Billy feels like. After the past few weeks he’s had, he thinks he wants to stay as far away from dangerous as he possibly can.

Steve surrounds himself with his typical crowd between classes. He looks up and down each hallway to make sure there’s no sign of Billy, and heads in the opposite direction when he spots him. He’s quieter than usual. Distracted. Doesn’t speak much when spoken to.

He must be more conspicuous than he thinks because Nancy grabs his arm on his way to his next class.

“You okay?” She asks him, concern written all over her face.

He’s touched by her concern. Typical Nancy. Steve gives her a nod and a half-smile in return. “Yeah, of course,” he says lightly. “Why wouldn’t I be?”

Nancy frowns as she studies him. They’ve been on good terms since their breakup, all things considered. After all, what is the end of a teenage romance when monsters and psychic children are concerned? They just weren’t meant to be. Life is bigger than Steve and Nancy. The year they shared together was rife with imperfections. And he can’t fault her for any of it.

“You seem… a little off.”

A classic Steve Harrington grin spreads on his face. “I’m fine, Nance,” he chuckles lightly to let her know he’s alright. “You know me,” he gives her shrug of his shoulders. “I’m always fine.”

She doesn’t look like she believes him.

~

The worst part about attending a small high school is that short of staying away altogether, it’s almost impossible to properly avoid someone. Apparently, hiding out in one of the private study rooms of the library during his free period wasn’t sufficient means to evade the new king of Hawkins High.

Billy is smart enough to recognize the signs of someone purposely avoiding him. And he’s pissed as hell about it.

Steve’s head snaps up when the door to his study space opens and in strides Billy Hargrove, scowl on his features as he slams the door behind him louder than anyone should in the library, of all places.

Steve gapes in shock. His pencil slips from his fingers, dropping onto the text that he was barely focused on. Because now they’re alone, in an enclosed space, nothing but tense air between them. He straightens when Billy approaches his desk.

“You been avoidin’ me, Harrington?”

“No,” Steve lies.

Billy sees right through him. “You’re a terrible liar.”

“I’m not… lying,” Steve stutters, as he closes his books in lieu of looking at the other man.

“Then what is this, huh?” Billy demands. “I thought… I thought we were okay.” There’s a hint of insecurity in the way his voice breaks at the end that causes guilt to strike in Steve’s chest. He never meant to make the other man feel bad. Billy’s been trying, he reminds himself. He remembers what he told Max during their conversation that had

been overshadowed by his jarring revelation. Billy's trying.

"I-I just um…" Steve's mind blanks as he stands from his seat. His breath hitches and he takes a step back, suddenly desperate for any small amount of space between them. He clears his throat. "I-I have class," he mutters pathetically.

"So skip it," Billy hisses.

"I can't skip class," Steve says through tight lips.

"Why not?" Billy asks, taking a step closer.

"Because… because I can't be failing physics my last year!" Steve says desperately.

"I'm sure you'll get by just fine," Billy says darkly.

There's a tightness in Steve's chest as he realizes how close they stand. Never before had he felt the significance of the space between them until now. Not even when Billy was bashing his face in. His nerves are on fire and he feels the danger of the situation he's in.

"Look… I know," he says softly.

"You know what?" Billy's voice is cold and hard as he steps closer still.

"I know you're…" Steve swallows and looks away. "I know you're a fucking queer."

He didn't mean for it to come out like that.

Billy freezes. For a moment, Steve thinks he's about to get his ass beat again. Until Billy lets out a hysterical laugh. His shoulders shake with peals of laughter and his grin stretches ear to ear. "What world are you living in, Harrington?" He sounds just unhinged enough that Steve thinks it might not be good idea to be in a cramped space with him. "Is this how you justify it to yourself? Now that I'm here stealing all the bitches from you? You tell yourself I'm a fucking *fag?"*

Steve flinches and drops his eyes.

“Answer me,” Billy says dangerously. *“King Steve.”*

“I think you should step back,” Steve says softly.

“Or what?” Billy demands. His eyes are wide with fury, teeth bared like a feral animal as he takes another step forward.

“Don’t do this, man.” Steve shakes his head slowly.

“Or *what?”* Billy growls again, getting in his face.

What a start, Steve realizes the other man has backed him into the wall. A shudder runs down his spine. Either the school needs to turn down the damn heat, or it’s just radiating from the man nearly pressed against him.

Steve straightens himself to his full height, determined to stand his ground. “I’m not gay,” he says softly.

Cold, blue eyes bore into him. “You sure about that?” Billy whispers, his voice hard as steel.

“What?” Steve’s voice is almost irritable as he chuckles at the thought. “I hate to crush your dreams, but I’m not a damn queer.”

“Hm,” Billy lets out a dry laugh. He nods his head lightly as he considers him. “You sure seem like one to me, Harrington. *Pretty boy.”*

Steve stares back at a mask that’s a good attempt for cool and collected. But there’s something else there that he wasn’t expecting. His brow furrows as he studies blue eyes and a tense gaze. “Holy shit,” he mutters under his breath.

Billy frowns. “What?”

“You like me,” Steve whispers softly. And the realization hits him like a ton of bricks. “*Holy shit.* You actually like me.”

“What the fuck are you talking about?” Billy growls, his face blanching under the light of the room. The immediate defensiveness, like a caged animal, tells Steve all that he needs to know.

“You do!” Steve says quickly. “That’s what this is!” And then it all makes sense. The man’s been smitten with him since he first laid eyes on him at Tina’s Halloween bash. Every moment on the court, the eyes, the smirks, the leers and touches, every antagonistic moment has led them here. *Like a kid pulling on some girl’s pigtails on the playground.* He can’t help but laugh because it suddenly makes *so* much sense. “Billy Hargrove actually has feelings like a human being.”

“Fuck you, Harrington.”

“No, no.” Steve murmurs candidly. “I see what this is now.” He takes every advantage to make the other man feel uncomfortable for once. “You *like* me. God, you might even be in *love* with me,” he exclaims arrogantly. “I mean, the alternative is that you just want my dick, and I don’t think that’s-”

Billy’s eyes flash dangerously a split second before his hands grab the lapels of Steve’s jacket. He slams him into the wall behind him and Steve’s back thumps painfully from the sheer force of it. *“Fuck you.”* Billy hisses darkly. “You’ll shut your damn mouth if you know what’s good for you, Harrington.”

Steve swallows nervously. His hands are wrapped around Billy’s forearms, but the other man doesn’t budge an inch. He stares, wide-eyed and shuddering at their proximity. “You gonna hit me again?” He whispers. He’s still got healing bruises around his eyes from their last bout. The migraines come and go. Another hit from the guy might actually put him out for good.

Billy remains quiet.

They breathe heavily and he feels it. Electricity.

For a ridiculous moment, Steve thinks that Billy’s about to kiss him.

But the grip against him is too tight for comfort. Steve trembles, feeling the other man’s hot breath against his lips. His shoulders sag, just a bit. “Billy,” he murmurs softly. “I’m not queer. I’m… I’m sorry.”

He doesn’t know what he’s expecting in response to that. Devastation,

maybe? Disappointment? But that might just be his ego talking.

A moment later, Billy smirks. “Let’s find out,” he growls, amusement in his voice.

“W-what?” Steve squeaks. He freezes when Billy’s hands move from his jacket to his belt. He gives a shocked little flinch when his pants are hastily undone. “What are you doing?” He gasps, as Billy reaches into his pants and palms his half-hard cock within his briefs. He might be having a fucking mental breakdown.

“You seem like you’re enjoying this, Harrington.”

Steve’s head knocks against the wall behind him, shutting his eyes as he shudders. “Holy shit, Billy-” For a brief second, he wonders if he’s freaking out too much to get fully hard. But with a few smooth strokes of Billy hand-the fucker does not mess around-he’s good and stiff within seconds.

Billy flicks his thumb under the sensitive spot right under the head and twists his hand *just right,* and Steve is trembling under his touch, hard as a fucking rock.

“Billy, wait-”

And then the other man sinks to his knees.

Any words Steve had left to say never make it past his throat when Billy pulls his pants down to his knees. Steve is left gaping in shock as he stares down at him. He lets out a choked gasp when Billy takes him in his mouth. His knees damn near give out when he’s buried in the wet heat of a man who clearly knows what he’s doing.

Billy’s technique is impeccable. It’s a shock to realize that this likely isn’t the first dick Billy’s had in his mouth.

Steve’s hands weakly bury themselves in hairspray coated curls. The other man lets his hands guide his motions. Slow, heavy circles of his tongue run along the sensitive underside of his cock. The sight of Billy’s lips stretched wide around him causes his hips to involuntarily jerk forward. A growl from deep within Billy’s throat leaves Steve trembling. And when Billy’s eyes glare up at him, meeting his own in

a moment of shocking clarity, Steve almost cums right then and there.

Steve's grip tightens on Billy's hair. He continues to thrust into that hot, welcoming mouth. He's not holding back, not like he does with the girls he's done this with, and Billy takes it all with ease. Strong hands press bruises into his hips. He's so close. They maintain their eye contact as Billy hums around his cock like a pro.

As determined as Steve is to keep his eyes open, like it might give him some semblance of control over an uncontrollable situation, he squeezes them shut when his orgasm swells through him like a wave. He groans heavily as he cums, biting down hard on his lip in fear of being overheard through thin walls.

His eyes flutter open weakly. Billy's watching his face the entire fucking time. He swallows every hot pulse as Steve empties himself down his throat, and somehow makes it look elegant. He gives him one last, slow lick to his oversensitive cock as he pulls away, leaving Steve trembling on shaky legs, weak and boneless as he sags against the wall. It takes everything he's got to maintain enough motor function to not to collapse to the ground.

Billy speaks first after he's climbed back to this feet. "What's the verdict, huh?" The hoarseness of his voice goes straight to Steve's cock.

Steve mutters an incoherent stream of obscenities under his breath, and gives a shocked little flinch when Billy not so gently stuffs him back into his pants. He bites down a moan as he glares defiantly at the other man, who wears an arrogant smirk on his face as he raises his eyebrows.

Even under normal circumstances, Steve wishes nothing more than to wipe that look off his face. And these aren't normal circumstances. Billy Hargrove just sucked his brain out through his fucking dick.

"You fucker," Steve manages to croak. His voice is shaky and unrecognizable to his own ears. He adjusts his clothes as well as he can, as he tries to get his limbs to respond again.

Billy still doesn't put any more space between them. There's a wicked grin on his lips as he looks at him hungrily. For a crazy moment, Steve thinks his confidence would actually be really attractive if he wasn't such a douchebag about it.

He straightens as he slowly regains his composure. It suddenly feels too intimate. Too weird. Too terrifying. Like he doesn't know whether he wants to crush their lips together or push him the hell away from him.

Boldly, Billy runs a hand down his chest as a quiet little moan escapes from Steve's lips. "You sure seem like a fucking queer to me," he growls, his voice low as he leans even closer, so close he might be able to hear Steve's heart pounding in his chest. *"Pretty boy."*

Steve closes his eyes, his initial resistance gone. "You are such a dick," he whispers sourly. He feels the ghost of fingers digging into his hips, and a warm breath on his lips.

"Hm," Billy chuckles softly. "Takes one to know one, Harrington."

Steve groans quietly. He just suffered the best blow job of his life, from a guy, and one he has every reason to hate, no less.

The only coherent thought he can muster, is that he wants more.

5. Chapter 5

Summary for the Chapter:

> There are some things that Billy can't admit out loud.
> He lets Steve do the talking instead.

Billy meets his father's steely eyes across the dinner table and nods his head in greeting. He keeps his head down as Susan casually asks Max about her day. He knows better than to butt into the conversation.

It's better to stay quiet than to risk his father's anger. Billy knows from experience that the smallest slight can set him off. It had been this way for years, getting worse before it got better. Nowadays, he knows well to keep in line, and with a little luck, he avoids the worst of it.

He's got too much on his mind anyway, so he prefers to simply eat his dinner in silence.

"I was at my friend Mike's house today." He hears Max say.

"Oh?" Susan smiles at her daughter. "I'm so glad you've made friends already. Did Billy give you a ride?"

Billy glances up as three pair of eyes land on him. He hesitates just long enough for Max to speak on his behalf. "He did," she says smoothly. "And Mike doesn't live far."

"That's good," Susan smiles.

Billy meets Max's eyes and receives a hard glare in return. He knows why she's lying for him. She doesn't want their parents prying into her business anymore than he does. Better for her for them to think they're getting along like a perfect pair of siblings should. She didn't do it for his sake.

He feels his father's eyes boring into him, and he refuses to let it get to him.

“Great casserole, Susan,” he says with a grin.

“Thank you, Billy.”

He nods and returns to his meal. The conversation shifts without him as his father starts talking about work. He drones out their voices as his thoughts return to one Steve Harrington. He wonders if Steve is eating dinner at the table with his own parents. Wouldn’t he have a laugh if he knew about Billy’s misery in his sham imitation of a functional, happy family.

His thoughts are always on Steve Harrington. Ever since he moved to this awful town. It’s almost obsessive how his mind can’t stay off of him for long. And he knows how dangerous it is. He knows his father would beat him within an inch of his life if he knew Billy hadn’t abandoned his *disgusting* faggot ways. But he can’t stay away from the guy. Steve pulled him into his orbit and Billy is circling him like stray cat afraid to approach, but yearning some semblance of intimacy that he’d never known before.

And after their encounter, his thoughts only became more troubled. He goes over their moments in his mind, again and again.

Steve had looked at him with solemn acceptance in his eyes. It felt like bait at the time. A cruel joke being played on him by some master of the universe. It would have almost been easier if Steve hated him for it. If Steve had punched him, pushed him away, called him a disgusting queer for what he did and what he wants. It would have made things simple. Black and white. Instead, he’s living in a world of grey. And Steve gave him more than Billy could have dreamed of.

That same day, they found each other long after the last bell had rung. Billy didn’t question why the other man stuck around after hours. He knew exactly what Steve wanted. They were just a pair of horny teenagers, eager to get off with something other than their own hand and their imagination.

Steve followed him into the last stall of the boy’s bathroom.

“How does this work?” Steve’s voice was shaky as he glanced down

between them.

“What are you a fucking moron?” Billy spat at him. “Jerk me off like you would your own cock.”

And Steve did just that. They got each other off rough and quick with their hearts pounding in their chests, then parted ways without another word. But it could have never been as simple as that. Grey is never simple.

After dinner, Billy retires silently to his room. He chain smokes cigarettes as he lays in bed, contemplating a world where it would be acceptable for him to drive over to Steve’s house and sneak up the window into Steve’s bedroom, like they were any other sex-crazed, teenage couple in the world.

That would be some world to live in.

~

It’s just after fourth period when Billy sees Steve in the hallways. It takes a hard moment for him to one, get his libido in check, and two, realize that Steve looks upset.

Steve and Nancy are talking in hushed whispers, huddled against the lockers, lost in their own world. She’s got a frown on her face, brows drawn tight as she looks up at him. For a second, Billy thinks he sees tears in her eyes.

A wave of jealousy washes over him when he takes in their closeness. But Byers is there too and they speak anxiously as students bustle around them on their way to class. It doesn’t look like a lover’s quarrel, and Billy can’t help but wonder what the hell it is they’re talking about.

Steve nods his head. He drags a hand through his messy hair that seems to reflect his mood. Nancy’s hand rests itself on Steve’s arm for a second before it’s gone. Byers says something and Steve nods his head again in understanding. They part ways, Nancy and her new boyfriend walking off in one direction, leaving Steve on his own. And he doesn’t look like he’s okay.

Billy gets to experience Steve's frustration first hand on the basketball court. He's never seen Steve play like this before, his face a mask hiding whatever anger or misery that troubles him. Steve's eyes are bright and focused, something hard and vicious in them as he runs down the court, making the shot that ties the score.

Billy gets a rush every time their eyes meet on the court. If he could only think with his brain instead of his dick for once, he would chastise himself for being so desperate and eager for the other man's attention.

"I'm impressed, Harrington." Billy grins and he dribbles the ball with one hand, keeping a distance between them as Steve stands between him and the hoop. His eyes flash with mirth. "Top of your game today, huh?"

"Just play the damn game, Billy," Steve snaps.

"*Damn*, Harrington. What's got you all-"

A second later, Billy hits the ground in shock as Steve manages to knock him off his feet, for once.

Despite their losing score, Billy can't hide his thrill. The adrenaline coursing through his veins is *almost* as deliriously euphoric as being around Steve Harrington. It's a high he doesn't want to come down from. And it's not over yet.

Coach blows the whistle and they head towards the showers. Along the way, Steve meets his gaze with a look that immediately sends his blood rushing south. His blood is still boiling hot under his skin from his exertion.

They're the last two in the showers when Steve corners him against a wall.

"Rough day, Harrington?" Billy asks hoarsely, because Steve has this unreadable look on his face that equally concerns him and turns him on.

"Let's not talk about it," Steve mutters, taking a step closer. "Let's not talk at all."

Billy blames his exhaustion for the way his heart jumps in his chest.

Their bodies are wet and warm underneath the spray of water. Steve presses them close. His hands are heavy where they press against Billy's abdomen, not quite as hesitant as he was before. Billy's head spins at the intimacy, barely an inch of space between them. He has to fight to focus his thoughts through the haze of lust. Steve's eyes are hooded and Billy sees droplets of water hanging from his lashes.

He physically jerks back when Harrington leans close.

Rage immediately bubbles beneath the surface from being caught off guard. "You tryin' to kiss me, Harrington?" Billy demands angrily. His arms are pressed defensively against the other man's chest.

Steve stares at him like he grew another head. "What?" He gapes.

Billy scoffs. "You a fucking fag or something?"

Steve blinks, unable to comprehend Billy's baffling behavior. As if they hadn't already touched each other's dicks.

"*What?"*

Billy wants to scream at him. But he settles for a harsh growl instead. "I don't know what kind of queer shit you think this is, Harrington. But don't fucking try that again."

Steve stares at him for a moment before he gives in. "Okay," he mutters. "Okay, yeah, whatever."

Billy fears he may have ruined the moment. He swallows tensely. But a second later, Steve presses him hard against the wall behind him. He lets out a short gasp and bites back a moan when Steve takes his dick in his hand. His breath catches in his throat as his cock throbs under Steve's touch.

This part is easy to fall into.

Steve buries his face into Billy's neck as he ruts against him, his heavy breaths fluttering into his ear. His hard cock presses into Billy's hip. They've little time to be gentle or thorough, so Billy quickly gets

the message. Their bodies are wet and writhing as they heave. Steve grips his hip tightly and Billy's hand curls around his back, pulling him close.

They grunt softly under the spray of water, giving sharp thrusts into each other's hand.

"Goddamn, Harrington," Billy whispers breathlessly. A moan escapes him seconds before his whole body stiffens. As he starts to cum, he sinks his teeth into the tender area where Steve's shoulder meets his neck. The other man trembles and shakes against him as his body stutters helplessly through his own orgasm.

They take a moment to catch their breaths before Steve shakily pulls back. His eyes are closed as he turns towards the spray that's long run cold.

Billy licks his lips in his post-orgasm haze as he watches droplets of water run down Steve's muscular back. He leans back against the wall as his eyes settle on the other man's ass. A sudden aching desire to see *King Steve* undone rushes through him.

"The fuck is up with you?" Billy asks curiously over the sound of rushing water.

Steve turns off the tap. He reaches for his towel without meeting his eyes. His wordless detachedness is a stark reminder that they're not friends. Billy doesn't know what the fuck they are. He rubs the towel over his wet hair before wrapping it around his waist. "Whatever, dude." Steve finally shakes his head. "I just wanted to get off."

Billy scoffs in disbelief. "That's it?"

"Yeah, that's it."

Billy tenses, but the other man is already walking away. "Fuck you, bitch," he shouts after him.

Harrington throws him the middle finger on his way out.

Alone again, Billy thumps his head hard against the wall behind him as he groans in frustration. He'd be lying if he said he wasn't staring

at Harrington's ass as he left. It leaves him feeling twitchy and possessive. His cock is achingly hard again between his legs.

Steve Harrington is going to drive him to a nervous breakdown.

~

Billy is spending another long evening staring at the cracks in his ceiling when he hears noises through the wall that he shares with Max, signaling her return from whatever adolescent's house she frequents nowadays.

A flutter of relief swells in his chest. Max no longer asks him for rides after school, despite the fact that their parents still thrust this responsibility upon him.

If anything happened to her, it would be his ass on the line.

The thought of Max skating home through dark streets, or bumming a ride from Jonathan Byers-Billy is well aware that the younger Byers boy hangs out with that rag tag group of nerds, or worse, getting a ride home from Harrington… it leaves a sick feeling in his gut.

Billy closes heavy eyes as Harrington flashes through his mind again. Hours had gone by as he contemplated calling Jenny or Stephanie or Becky, or any slut that he knew would jump on the opportunity for a romp in the backseat of his car. It makes him queasy just to think about it. Before, it had been about walking through the school with a swagger, every tryst another notch in his belt, trying to get a rise out of the dethroned king. But now, something tells him that Harrington wouldn't give a fuck if Billy hooked up with ten girls that night.

He gives a frustrated groan and jumps to his feet. His head spins and he gives it a hard shake. He's going to lose his damn mind if he stays in his room any longer.

Billy swings open his bedroom door and nearly runs right into his sister in the hallway. Max jumps back, startled, but regains her composure as quickly as he does.

"What do you want?" Her voice is low as she stares at him.

“I… I don’t know,” Billy mutters, shocking them both with his honestly. “Can’t think. Was considering going for a ride to clear my head.”

“Whatever.” Max shakes her head and steps around him to head towards the kitchen.

“Hey, did you…” Billy starts and cuts himself off. Fuck it. “Did you see Steve tonight?”

Max’s eyes narrow as she spins around to glare at him. “What’s it to you if I did?”

“I’m just…” Billy sighs and forces a grim smile. “He seemed kind of off today in school. I’m just… worried about him, that’s all.”

Max studies him for a long moment, and Billy shudders under her gaze. “I didn’t realize you two were so close,” she says, sarcasm dripping from every word.

Billy closes his eyes. He’s about to give up and walk away when Max speaks up again. “He dropped off Dustin and me tonight,” she says reluctantly. “Too cold to bike,” she tells him at his confused look.

“Did he… did he look okay to you?” Billy asks softly.

Max shrugs. “He seemed normal to me. But considering the circumstances, that’s not really saying much.”

Billy huffs, his eyes narrowing. But Max is already walking away without another word. His jaw clenches as the knot in his stomach grows heavily. He bites his lip, listening to the sounds of the television playing in the living room, knowing his father is likely planted in front of it for the rest of the night. One good thing about having parents who don’t give a shit, is that sometimes, they really don’t give a shit.

Billy heads back into his room to grab his keys and his jacket. Harrington should be home by now. Wouldn’t he be pleasantly surprised by an late night visit from Billy Hargrove.

~

All the lights are on when Billy drives past the Harrington house. The familiar Beemer is the only car in the driveway, but Billy knows that's not a sure sign no one else is home. Just to be safe, he parks a block down and walks towards the house, pulling his jacket tight around him against the cold bite of the frigid air.

He swallows nervously as he glances up at the huge house. He can't just ring the fucking doorbell so he wanders around back, thinking he could throw rocks against Harrington's window until he catches the other man's attention.

But as he steps into the backyard, he's thrown for a loop by what he sees.

There's a familiar figure floating in the underground pool. The initial shock and panic fades-albeit slightly-when he sees movement as the other man keeps afloat in the heated water.

"Harrington, what the fuck are you doing?"

Steve startles at the sound of his voice. "Billy?" He stares at him blankly from the water. "What are you doing here?"

Billy stalks closer, wondering what kind of idiot just decides to go for a swim in the middle of fucking winter. All concern about Steve's parents possibly being home has left his mind.

"What the hell, Harrington?" Billy eyes a half empty bottle of vodka sitting on the ledge of the pool. "Are you fucking drunk?!" He wonders how in the hell the other man had the time since dropping off Max to get properly wasted.

Steve shrugs, looking quite comfortable amidst the steam from the heated water. He's still wearing his fucking clothes. His t-shirt sticks uncomfortably tight to his body, and beneath the water, Billy sees goddamn jeans on the guy.

"Why the hell are you drinking by yourself in a pool?"

Steve raises a lazy eyebrow as he considers him. "You could join me," he says casually.

Billy's tempted. But he glances down at the bottle again, and as he remembers the other man's earlier behavior, his concern wins out. The guy shouldn't be swimming alone while intoxicated on hard liquor. And when the hell did he start caring about Steve's safety anyway?

"The hell is going on with you, Harrington?" Billy mutters as he carefully takes a seat on the ledge of the pool. He picks up the bottle and sneers at the fancy label. He lifts the bottle to his lips, wincing from the burn as the alcohol goes down.

"Are you fucking stupid or do you have a death wish?"

Steve gently wades over and leans his arms over the ledge. He tilts his head to the side as he studies him, his eyes glazed in the dim lights of the backyard. "A bit of both, probably," Harrington jokes wryly, right before he takes the bottle from the other man's hands.

But Billy doesn't think that's fucking funny. He watches as chlorinated water drips from Steve's arms. The column of his throat bobs as he takes another drink and Billy swallows at the sight of it.

"Why the fuck are you wearing clothes in there?" He manages.

Steve's lips curl into a smirk. "Should I take them off?"

"Jesus, you're drunk," Billy scoffs, as he looks away uncomfortably.

"It was a moment of spontaneity," Steve offers, right before he floats back into the water.

Billy slowly glances around at the big house behind him. "Where are your parents?" He asks curiously. His eyes land on a window that he recalls from memory must be Steve's bedroom. There's no ledge beneath it. He would've broken his neck trying to get up there.

"They're in the city," Steve tells him. "Said they'd be back late." A lazy wave of his arms moves the water in a near hypnotizing manner. "They're gonna close the pool soon. For the winter. I figured I'd get one last use of it before it's shut down." He lifts his head to glance at the other man. "Sure you don't wanna come in?"

“No,” Billy mutters softly. “I really think you better come out before your ass drowns in there.”

“Aw, you almost sound like you’re worried about me,” Steve muses, as he gazes up at the dark night sky above him.

Billy’s about to scoff at the absurdity of his statement when Steve speaks again.

“Some girl died in here, you know?”

Billy freezes and stares at him in shock. “What?”

“Yeah.” Steve nods his head lightly, the water gently splashing onto his chin from the motion. “She died right here… in this very pool. And now I’m swimming in it. Pretty fucked up, right?”

“What the hell are you talking about?” His voice must sound strangled because Steve looks up at him with a grin.

“I’m kidding,” Steve says with a gentle smile. “I’m kidding, you should have seen your face!”

“What the hell, Harrington!” Billy growls, his voice raw with anger. “That’s not fucking funny!”

“No, I think it’s pretty funny,” Steve says wryly. But his voice has lost all traces of his earlier humor.

Billy remembers the conversation he saw earlier between Steve, his ex-girlfriend, and Byers. He remembers Steve walking away upset, his behavior at practice, and then what happened after. “What’s got you acting like this?” He asks softly.

A heavy moment passes before Steve meets his gaze steadily. “Why are you acting like you know jack shit about me?”

Billy swallows the hard lump in his throat. “You said I should try, right?” *God, he’s been trying.* “Maybe I’m trying to get to know you. Maybe I’m trying to…” *Be better.*

Steve silently drops his gaze to the water.

“What’s wrong with you?” Billy asks again. He doesn’t know why he keeps pressing it. He just knows that figuring out Harrington’s problems gives him a good excuse to not think about his own. And maybe… just maybe… his own concern for the other man is too deep and unsettling to ignore.

“You wouldn’t believe me if I told you,” Steve finally says.

“Try me.”

Steve simply shakes his head. He closes his eyes as he floats in the water, looking pretty damn at peace. Billy can’t take his eyes off of him.

“Catch up or go home, Hargrove,” Steve suddenly says, without looking up.

Billy remembers the bottle he still holds in his hands. He could actually use a good, hard drink. “You gonna start talkin’ if I do?”

“Either that or you could suck my dick again.”

Billy snorts. The sound echoes through the empty backyard, and he gets a soft laugh from Harrington in return. The thing is, he’s certainly not opposed to sucking Steve’s dick. But he takes a generous drink from the bottle and winces. “Start talkin’, bitch.”

What comes next is like pulling teeth. Except the knockout gas ain’t working right, and he’s trying to put the pieces together through the perspective of haze and confusion.

“It wasn’t my fucking fault,” Steve starts softly. “I know it wasn’t my fault. I know that. Even though she *thinks* we did it. I know she doesn’t really mean it, either.”

Nancy, Billy assumes. Who else could he be talking about but Nancy?

“And it’s like this whole time, I just wanted it to be over,” Steve continues. “I wanted to move on, and just live my life, and forget the whole thing ever happened. But now it is over. Her parents will get justice, or whatever. Closure, maybe. Which is bullshit, but they deserve it. She’ll be… buried. This whole nightmare is… over.” He

lets out a short, dry laugh. “It really is over now… I should be happy. So why do I feel so fucking sad?”

Whatever Billy was expecting to come out of Steve’s mouth, this wasn’t it. He’s confused and doesn’t even know the first thing to say to this confession. “You… you feel sad?” He manages pathetically.

“I’m fucking depressed.”

The guy that Billy thought had it all, sounds more genuinely miserable than Billy had ever admitted to feeling in his entire life.

“It’s like… everything’s coming to an end,” Steve says softly. “But I still have nightmares like it’s not over. I can’t go back to the way I was. And now I’m realizing that I’m as much of a freak as the guys I used to make fun of.” He scoffs, bringing himself upright in the water, and finally meeting Billy’s eyes. *“King fucking Steve*, right?”

Billy stares at him silently. The bottle is heavy in his hands and he really wants to take another drink. “You’re not a freak,” he says, his voice low with pain.

Steve stares at him for a long time. Long enough that Billy squirms under his gaze, feeling raw and exposed. And how does that work, when it was Steve who bared his soul? Not that there was much that Billy actually understood. But he knows pain when he sees it.

Steve slowly wades over. He pulls himself onto the ledge to settle next to the other man. He’s dripping water everywhere and some of it splashes onto Billy’s jacket. Billy’s too stunned to pull away.

“You ever see a dog without a face?” Steve asks, sounding far too casual when he’s talking madness. “I bet you’d shit your pants,” he says with a chuckle.

“Fuck off,” Billy mutters, thinking the other man is just drunk rambling now. But there’s a small grin on his lips as the air around them lightens.

Billy feels Steve’s eyes boring holes into the side of his face. His face warms and he’s thankful it’s dark enough to hide any evidence of his skin flushing.

“I’d protect you from the dogs,” Steve murmurs. “Even though you’re an ass.”

Billy frowns. “Why do you keep talking about dogs?”

He thinks Steve looks a bit dazed as he watches the other man’s eyes settle on the night sky.

“At least I found something I’m good at.”

“And what’s that?”

“Protecting people.”

“Protecting people,” Billy echoes.

“Yeah.” Steve gives him a genuine smile. “It makes me… it makes me feel good.”

They don’t talk for a while, as Billy continues to take small sips from the bottle, mulling over the other man’s strange words. Steve silently stares at the stars. It finally hits him after a bit. A nice buzz in his head that settles warm and heavy to his limbs.

He finally realizes Steve is trembling, shivering from the cold. The man is soaking wet, wearing a t-shirt in near freezing temperatures.

“Let’s get you inside,” his voice is small, masking the panic that rolls through his gut. “You’re gonna catch a damn cold.”

Steve doesn’t protest and they climb unsteadily to their feet. Billy grabs the bottle so the other man’s parents don’t find it the next day, and he follows Steve’s wet footprints into the house.

Billy trails after him up the stairs, an unspoken invitation hanging in the air.

Steve leads them into his bedroom. He turns to find Billy’s presence close, and the door closes behind them. He’s getting better at reading Billy’s faces now. The other man is scared, nervous. Neither of them are under the illusion that this *thing* between them is anything other than intimate.

But neither would ever admit it out loud.

“You reek of chlorine,” Billy mutters.

“Sorry,” Steve murmurs, as he uncoordinatedly pulls his soaked shirt over his head.

Billy takes every opportunity to simply stare as the other man struggles out of his wet pants. Pale, fading teeth marks glare accusingly at him from Steve’s shoulder. Pulling his eyes away, he grabs a towel he sees hanging over the back of a chair. Steve takes it from him, and for a moment, their eyes meet. Billy looks away first.

“Stay,” Steve says, his voice muffled. Billy is struck by a wave of déjà vu. This is the second time he’s treated to the sight of Steve towel drying his wet hair. But now, the other man is in significantly better spirits.

“What?” His voice hoarse and dry.

“Stay,” Steve says again, dropping the towel to the ground. He’s naked and beautiful and completely unashamed. Billy’s mouth waters at the sight, even as shame lodges itself in his throat.

“Stay here tonight.”

“I…”

“You got somewhere better to be?”

“No,” Billy admits.

“That’s what I thought. And you can suck me off in the morning,” Steve says with a smirk and a twinkle in his eyes.

Billy can’t help the grin that spreads on his face as he rolls his eyes. “Fuck you, Harrington.” He lets Steve pull him towards the bed. Billy sheds his clothes as he goes, and they climb into sheets that are nicer than anything Billy’s ever known. Steve’s skin is cold to the touch. Hesitantly, Billy wraps an arm around him and pulls him closer.

“You’re missin’ out, you know,” Steve murmurs into his neck. His

voice is tired and there's the barest hint of a slur to his words.

"What's that?" Billy asks softly.

"I'm a great kisser."

Billy closes his eyes. A second later, the body beside him pulls away. An ache in his chest mourns the loss. But then the lights go off, the room is shrouded in darkness, and Steve is pressed right back against his side.

He does imagine what it would feel like to kiss Steve. He's kissed boys before. He kisses boys in his fantasies and his dreams.

He thinks about kissing Steve as hard as he punched him. Rough, like a fight for dominance. He thinks about burying his hands in his hair, yanking on soft strands, and viciously pressing their lips together. He thinks about kissing him soft. Chaste and gentle, like he's never kissed anything before in his life.

Billy has moments thinking these thoughts every single night. He tells himself it's just a fantasy his fucked up mind made up to torture him with. And the reality is, sooner or later, he's going to ruin Steve Harrington. He's going to drag him down to the depths where people like Billy feed and leech and destroy.

He's not selfless enough to let Steve free of that.

Steve shivers beside him. Billy rolls over slightly onto his side. His eyes slowly adjust to the darkness. They trace the features of Steve's face, eyes closed and beautiful.

"This is pretty gay, Harrington," he whispers.

"Hm," Steve murmurs against him, already half-asleep. "Worry about it tomorrow."

Billy takes that advice and closes his eyes. He inhales the scent of chlorine and fresh sheets. It's the best night of sleep he's had in a long time.

6. Chapter 6

Summary for the Chapter:

> Rage has been Billy's closest friend for as long as he can remember.

In an otherwise empty house, Billy and Steve have the luxury of learning each other's bodies without fear of interruption or discovery by unwanted eyes. In the safety of Steve's bedroom, Billy takes advantage of every such opportunity he gets.

Weeks have gone by since these encounters started between them. Only rarely, do they risk touching each other in the showers at school, long after their teammates have deserted the place. Once or twice, they got each other off at the quarry, high off being exposed in the open and the feeling of each other's skin. But usually, they retreat to the safety of Steve's empty house.

It's a big house, and his parents aren't often home.

Billy covets these moments, though he's careful not to show it in front of the other man. He keeps him at a distance, and reminds himself every time the guilt rears its ugly head, that Steve isn't exactly getting the short end of the stick. Especially when he makes Harrington moan and whimper like a bitch in heat, keening as he arches towards him, his cock between Billy's lips as he rolls his hips to fuck his throat with sharp thrusts that steal the breath from Billy's lungs.

"You taste like old pennies, Harrington."

Steve breathes heavily, still trying to catch his breath in the aftermath of emptying himself down Billy's throat. "I think you like it," he murmurs, eyes closed as Billy watches him. "You swallow every fucking time."

Billy smirks, knowing that none of the girls Steve's been with would have been so bold.

Billy's eyes are all hunger, and it makes Steve shiver as the other man wets his lips. He moans softly as Billy palms his sensitive cock and sucks in a harsh breath. It's clear that Billy wants more. He wants more than a hand and a sloppy blowjob. He wants to get fucking laid. Steve just about *squeaks* when Billy's fingers stroke beneath his balls, too tenderly close to *that* spot, eagerly desperate to open him up more than he's willing to give.

"You're not fucking me in the ass," Steve growls.

Billy smirks, batting his eyes in a dismissive manner.

"This—this is good," Steve chokes, as Billy continues to grind on top of him. "But I draw the line at butt stuff."

"I could rock your world," Billy murmurs into his ear.

"Fat chance," Steve's head spins. "I'm not a fucking girl," he mutters.

Billy grins down at him, keenly aware of that fact. "You're pretty like one," he drawls.

"Fuck you."

"I'm tryin'," Billy smirks. He pauses, cocks his head to one side as he glances down at the other man. "You sure you don't want to feel my dick up your ass?"

"It's not happening," Steve says dryly.

Billy lets out an 'oomph' when Steve pushes him off of him, and he collapses besides the man on the bed. His cock is still hard, but Harrington does him the decency of not ignoring it. He doesn't hide his eager grin as Steve climbs to his hands and knees, towering above him with an arrogance that he thinks is worthy of *King Steve*.

Steve's voice is ragged and soon to be fucked raw. Billy can just imagine the sight of him, a trail of spit falling from his lips, precum on his tongue, saliva trailing from his chin… He wonders how wide he can stretch that sinful mouth.

Billy's chest heaves. He bites back a groan when Steve's mouth finds

his cock. His teeth sink into his bottom lip, stopping himself from groaning in pleasure.

“Fuck, Harrington,” he gasps. “You’ve really got a mouth on you.”

“You might have mentioned that,” Steve muffles around his cock.

Billy grins, quickly losing the ability to form coherent words. Steve makes a humming noise, his tongue dragging filthily against the underside of his cock. Billy blinks down at him heavily and *goddamn* if Steve Harrington with a cock in his mouth isn’t the prettiest fucking thing Billy’s ever laid eyes on.

He buries his hands in Steve’s mussed locks and hisses low as he breathes through his nose. Heat pools in his belly as the other man makes downright *obscene* noises around him.

His cock is the only one Steve’s ever had in his mouth, he knows that much. It’s the only one that’s ever touched his tongue. The thought makes him shiver and he grows impossibly harder.

“I could fuck your pretty mouth all night,” Billy growls.

He really wishes that were true. But he’s already close, too fucking close. And he knows he’s not going to last long.

Steve makes eye contact as he wraps a hand around the base, strokes him as he sinks down and Billy’s cock hits the back of his throat.

“Holy s-shit, Harrington—” Billy stutters as his whole body stiffens, and he’s cumming, hard and fast. His hips shake and he fucks Steve’s throat mercilessly through his orgasm. His head finally drops back to the pillow behind him and his hands release their tight grip on the other man’s hair, allowing him to retreat upright.

“You fucking asshole,” Steve gasps, his voice raw and broken as he wipes his lips with the back of his hand.

Billy chuckles heavily. Out the corner of his eye, he sees Steve sit up on the bed, his back facing him. He trembles, chest flush with sweat as he watches him. He almost wishes Steve would try to kiss him again. He imagines tasting himself on Steve’s tongue, just for a

second before he would push the other man away.

But Steve hasn't tried that again since the first time.

Billy sucks in a deep breath before sitting up himself. His head spins from the sudden movement. And then he's reaching for his discarded clothes on Steve's floor.

Steve never asks him to leave. But Billy's too stubborn to stay.

Since the night he fell asleep next to the drunk boy that he hasn't been able to stop thinking about, he never stays. He can't allow himself to want more. He can't fool himself into thinking it could *be* anything more. Not when he goes home to a homophobic, asshole father who would sooner skin him alive than accept a fag in his household.

God knows he'd rather spend his time in Steve's bed rather than go home.

But Steve hasn't asked him to stay again.

There's no reason to stay if they're not getting each other off.

That's just how it is.

~

Life goes on for Billy. It's funny how little things have changed since Billy kicked Harrington's ass, and then a few days later, cornered him in a small, secluded study room of the library and sucked his dick until he couldn't see straight.

They're not friends, not really. Steve doesn't open up to him again. Whatever had been bothering him then seems to fade as time passes. Billy never asks, and Steve doesn't offer any more details.

Life at home has become manageable. He stays out of Max's path and she stays out of his. He keeps himself in line and his father leaves him alone. Susan… is just Susan.

They're an archetype of the happy American family. Almost. And isn't

that the goal?

It's the best Billy could hope for in a small town that doesn't tolerate any queer behavior. Not that California was much better by any means. But at least, there were some who were less afraid. And they were always the ones who made him feel like less of a freak, less of a monster inside his own skin.

Now, Hawkins is slowly becoming his own little home away from home.

But still, he's counting down the days until he can get the fuck out of this hellhole.

At least he can count on his unrivaled reputation among the students of Hawkins High. Or so he thought. Most stay out of his way, giving him the respect that he'd earned. The girls trail after him, some eagerly draping themselves over his arm, for only his meager attention in return.

But there is one person that he'd pissed off in his time in Hawkins, other than Harrington, of course, and not nearly as appealing.

Tommy approaches him in the locker room after practice, an ugly sneer dripping off his face. A few others still hang around, getting ready for their shower. Common sense would have told them not to mess with Billy Hargrove, but apparently Tommy lacks that significant part of his brain.

"I thought you were cool for a second, Hargrove," Tommy laughs. He makes a show of looking around the group around them, looking for backup maybe, or just trying to appear more intimidating than he is. "I guess I was wrong."

"Fuck off," Billy says, his voice a dangerous warning in itself.

Tommy doesn't take the hint. Maybe the guy has a death wish, Billy doesn't fucking know. Because he says the worst possible thing in full view of half a dozen dumb teenage boys, each of whom are watching their interaction with wide, wary eyes.

"Maybe you're just a fucking queer like Harrington."

Billy's blood boils under his skin. Harrington's there, a few lockers away, staring at the commotion like he's watching a car crash happen in slow motion. Billy has a short fuse, everyone fucking knows that. And if Tommy's too dumb to know what's good for him then he deserves the ass kicking he's about to have served.

"The fuck did you say to me?" Billy growls through gritted teeth. "You little asshole—"

"I *said,* maybe you're just a fucking queer like—"

Tommy's words set off a red flag in Billy's rage. He moves quick like an animal and slams his fist into Tommy's face before the other man knows what hit him. He does it again and again, lost in the cacophony of his rage even as Tommy falls to ground, his hands coming up to protect himself in a pitiful attempt at self-defense. Shocked voices shout all around them, lost to Billy's ears as the rage blasts through his veins.

"Shut your fucking mouth! You goddamn piece of shit!"

He wants to pound Tommy's face into the fucking ground.

And that's what he might have done if it weren't for Harrington's voice making its way into his brain. It leaches through his system, even as his fists continue to slam into Tommy's bloody face.

"Billy, stop!" Harrington's voice screams in his ear. *"Stop it! Get off of him!"*

Billy doesn't respond, too lost in the familiar feeling of knuckles pounding into bone.

But Steve gets a good grip under his arms. He's pulled back in the other man's strong hold and his fists can no longer find their target. He's dragged off of Tommy and he throws his arms violently to shove off Harrington's grip.

"What the hell, Billy?!" Steve screams at him. "Stop!"

There's a brief moment of clarity where Billy doesn't answer. He glares around at the shocked faces around him, then to Tommy's look

of fear on the ground, pained by the damage done to his face by Billy's own hands.

"He…" Billy swallows harshly. "That fucker called me a goddamn queer—" He protests. His words fall silent when Steve pushes him back hard and he slams into the lockers behind him. He breathes heavily. There are too many eyes on him.

A second later, Harrington saves him.

"What the hell are you all looking at?" Steve growls at their group of onlookers. "Fuck off!"

They scurry away, averting their eyes as Steve glares daggers at them.

Tommy's just about struggled to his knees. His face is a bloody mess. It drips from his nose, likely broken as he tries to stop the flow of blood with his hands. The color drains from his face as Billy glares at him, still fuming even as Steve stands between them.

There's embarrassment on Tommy's face, a bit of shame, maybe even gratitude towards Harrington for saving his ass. But Billy just wants to wipe the goddamn look off his face.

"Tommy, go!" Steve says, his eyes burning with fury. "Get out of here!" He urges, blocking him from Billy's view with his body. "I said go!"

Billy doesn't get the see Tommy scurry away like the pathetic piece of shit he is because Steve rounds on him as soon as they're alone.

"What the hell is wrong with you?" Steve hisses.

Billy's knuckles throb and hurt, but he meets Steve's glare heatedly. "You heard what he fucking said," he growls.

"He didn't mean it!" Steve stares at him like he's missing a few screws. And then his next words look like they pain him to say. "We call people queer all the time," he mutters softly. "Don't take it so personally."

But Billy grits his teeth, his jaw clenches painfully from the force of it. How can he not?

“I thought they weren’t your friends,” he mutters, turning his rage onto the only other person left in the room. “You were the one going on and on about how him and the others at this school are just a bunch of assholes, those *fuckers.*”

“We were close once,” Steve says softly, almost as if he’s aching for those times. And then Billy can no longer read the expression on his face.

“Close once,” Billy scoffs. He sniffs, because the idea of *him* being in the wrong is so preposterous in his own mind. And why is Steve siding with *Tommy* instead of him? “Why do you give a damn, Harrington?”

Steve looks at him sadly. It’s odd, and it leaves a bitter taste in Billy’s mouth how the man must feel sorry for him. Steve couldn’t possibly understand how he feels.

“Because you can’t go around beating up every guy who pisses you off!”

Billy’s eyes flash dangerously. “Why the hell not?”

Steve’s shoulders sag. He gapes at him, so sad and pitiful, it makes the rage boil under Billy’s skin once again. “Are you kidding me?” Steve asks, anguished. “Because… because you can’t!”

“Watch me,” Billy growls stubbornly. He won’t be swayed. He won’t let some pathetic *nobody* like Tommy make him feel less than, and he won’t become the laughing stock of a pitiful school, of a small town where most of the inhabitants don’t even know what a real chance of life *feels* like. He’s not going to be *that* guy. Even if Harrington is too weak to face the facts of reality.

Billy’s well aware of the importance of how people perceive him. He’d rather be feared by men and fawned over by women than any other alternative.

Steve watches him sadly and Billy feels a sickness rising in his gut.

“You got some fucking anger issues,” Steve says softly.

“Yeah, tell me something I don’t know.”

Billy takes a step forward. He doesn’t stop, even as Steve’s gaze drops wretchedly to the floor. He sees the shame and the fear, but now… he has the advantage. So he doesn’t stop. *“You should have let me kill the bastard.”*

“Fuck, Billy,” Steve mutters, bile rising in his throat. “You really think that’s the solution to everything?”

“That asshole deserves it!” Billy says, his voice shockingly calm and in control. “You think he would give you the time of day if he knew you sucked my cock like a little whore? You think he wouldn’t spread that shit around the school because you *used* to be *close?”*

Steve shakes his head sadly. “He doesn’t know anything,” he murmurs, some last ditch effort to get through to him. “He’s just trying to get you riled up.”

As if that makes it any better.

“Christ, Harrington, you don’t know how the fucking world works,” Billy spits.

Steve doesn’t answer him.

So Billy steps forward again, pressing their bodies close. He’s scared of a lot of things, but he’s not scared of Harrington. His hands harshly grip the other man’s hips, forcing him against the lockers behind him.

Steve staggers back more out of wariness than any real force of impact.

The knot sinks in his stomach when Steve won’t meet his eyes.

“What’s wrong, Harrington?” Billy growls lowly into his ear. “Scared of someone walking in and finding out that you’re a fag?”

Steve’s palms push against his chest. “Why are you so angry all the time?” He asks softly instead of answering Billy’s question.

Color floods his cheeks.

Billy bites back a response and laughs. It's a harsh, ugly sound, and it makes the other man pause. He doesn't want Steve's empathy. He wants Steve to stop looking at him with sad, pitying doe eyes.

Whatever it is that they have, Billy forces himself to believe it's a mere farce of something intimate.

He grins, lewd and menacing as he starts groping the front of Steve's gym shorts. The fabric is thin and the other man is soft under his palms.

"What the fuck, Billy!" Steve says harshly, and he tries to pull his hand away, but Billy doesn't budge. If anything, he lurches forward, pressing the other man harder against the lockers as he winces in discomfort.

"What's the matter, Harrington? Not into it? I bet I could change that pretty quickly…"

Steve shakes his head and he's not getting hard under Billy's touch. He looks pained and the rejection makes him blaze hot all over. Billy snatches his hand back. "The fuck is wrong with you, Harrington?"

"We're not doing this when you're like this."

Billy's stomach twists itself into painful knots. His skin flushes with shame and he sneers to hide it. "Like this?" He hisses, and he leans close to get into Harrington's face.

"You're pissed," Steve mutters. His eyes are bright when they meet Billy's. "And *fucking* violent."

Something dangerous boils under his skin and he shoves Harrington back with all the force he can muster. His pupils flare and his mouth twitches as he bares his teeth, his face contorted into something ugly with rage. Fear briefly flashes across Steve's face before it disappears, as quick as it came.

"When am I not like this, you bastard?" Billy snarls. "Huh? When am I not like this?"

“Billy,” Steve’s voice is shamefully small as he makes a grab for his wrist, but Billy pulls back.

Billy can’t be around him right now. Not when his hands are clenched into dangerous fists, eager to *hit* something until he feels better.

“Fuck off, Harrington,” Billy growls. “If you don’t want to suck my dick, what the hell are you good for?”

The concern on Steve’s face morphs into sadness, and it plunges into Billy’s gut like a hot knife. He turns away from it before he does something he’ll regret. He’s either going to punch Harrington in the face or kiss him. And he can’t do either. So he storms out of the room instead, choosing to skip the shower altogether. And he leaves Steve leaning against the lockers, watching him go with pained, hopeless eyes, nothing but his own conflicted thoughts for company.

7. Chapter 7

Summary for the Chapter:

> Steve reminiscences over how his life has changed, the good and the bad.

Notes for the Chapter:

> Ahh wow. I couldn't look at this thing for three weeks. Apologies, inspiration is hard, y'all. Comments are so greatly appreciated :)

After surviving a reluctant trip to the upside-down and risking life against an army of demo-dogs, Steve would have thought he could handle anything. Grades and college applications and breakups seem almost inconsequential in comparison. But Steve never expected Billy Hargrove. He certainly never expected to jump into bed with him. Figuratively, anyway. The worst part being that he can't exactly talk to anybody about it. Least of all, Billy himself. Billy doesn't need to know about the hell dimension growing underneath Hawkins, and Steve can at least *act* like he's not constantly thrown for a loop by the other man's behavior.

He's long accepted that Nancy has found comfort in another man's arms. She choose Jonathan over him and she's happy with that decision. Maybe she never loved him at all, and he was too dumb to realize it. The pain makes it harder to use either of them as a support system for the events of the past year. No amount of agonizing over his past actions, pouring over mistakes, and pondering *what ifs* and *what could have been* makes it any easier.

He tries to move on. That's the healthier alternative.

Somehow, Billy Hargrove helps with that. Sometimes. At the very least, the man serves as a good distraction. When they're alone and naked, hands and mouths on each other's bodies, it's a *very* good distraction.

It is, until it isn't.

But the one good thing that came out of this mess, the one person, *shockingly,* that Steve can count on to brighten his day, is the very last person that he ever expected.

A snot-nosed brat with curly hair and a new toothy smile, probably the smartest kid—person—Steve has ever interacted with, and far more perceptive and inquisitive for his own good. His blunt honesty might be the thing Steve appreciates the most. Dustin's never afraid to speak his mind, and he'll tell him when he thinks Steve's being an idiot. There's no secrets and no second-guessing with Dustin. A year ago, Steve would have laughed at the idea of him developing a friendship with Dustin Henderson. But now, it's the easiest relationship on his roster.

And he should know better than to be surprised. On a cold Friday night in December, Steve knocks on the door of the Henderson house and grins wide when it swings open. "Hi, Mrs. Henderson."

"Steve! Sweetie, come on in!" She wraps him in a warm hug as he comes through the door, smiling into her embrace, which is so tender and motherly it makes him ache for the affection he hasn't been shown from his own mother since he was a child.

"Dustin's still getting ready in his room," she says gently as she pulls away. "He's taking an awful long time, I don't know what he's doing in there."

Probably fussing with his hair. Steve chuckles as he follows Mrs. Henderson's gaze towards Dustin's room.

"Dusty, your ride is here!" She shouts. Steve has to stifle a snort of amusement at the adorable nickname and he bites his tongue. And then Mrs. Henderson is turning back to him lovingly, still stroking the small cat in her arms. Mews 'Number Two'. Tews. Steve blinks heavily and stares at the small thing.

"Maybe you should go check on him," she says smoothly. "His room is around the corner, the last door on the left."

Steve nods and leaves Mrs. Henderson with her new kitten. He makes his way to Dustin's bedroom, grinning softly the whole way there.

He's ready to ridicule the kid. But memories of his own middle school dances flash into his mind, and he's cognizant enough to know that it must be different experience for Dustin.

Who would believe that Steve Harrington would be driving this nerd to the Snow Ball? And actually *happy* to do it? Because somehow, this kid is the only person who seems to really *get* him sometimes. And Steve's thankful for that every single day.

Steve carefully pulls aside the door to Dustin's room so as not to take the kid by surprise. His grin grows wider as he takes in the sight of Dustin hopelessly attempting to style his hair in front of the mirror. A familiar bottle of hairspray sits on the dresser.

"Dusty?" Is the first word that comes out of his mouth.

"Shut up, Steve." Dustin glares at him through the mirror.

"Nice suspenders, dork," Steve chuckles and slides the door shut behind him.

"Goddamnit, Steve!" Dustin's fingers angrily pull at his stiff curls. "How do I get this hairspray to work? The hair's not going up, it's just going *out!"*

Steve's eyes widen when he sees Dustin apply another hefty spray to his head. "Oh, *christ* kid, I said four puffs! *Puffs!"* Steve bemoans as he watches him. He quickly steps forward to stop him before Dustin does any more damage. "Let me see it!"

"Jesus!" Dustin rolls his eyes in pained annoyance. "It's not like you gave me great instructions to work with!"

"I thought it would have been obvious!" Steve grabs the comb lying on the dresser. "Sit down!" He gestures with it at the bed.

"Obvious?!" Dustin snaps. But he does as he's told.

Steve shakes his head as he tries to contain the mess of hair in front of him. He runs the comb over the sides, pushing them back. Volume certainly isn't Dustin's problem—it's managing the mass of curls. His tongue peeks out the corner of his mouth as he concentrates on how

to style the hair that's so different from his own.

Dustin's shuffles on the bed restlessly. "Are we gonna be late?" His voice is hesitant with a hint of nervousness cutting through his words.

"Late?" Steve gives him a small smile. "Being late is *classy.*"

"Classy?" Dustin pulls a face. "Being late is *rude.*"

"Look, this is a party—I mean, a dance," Steve corrects himself. "You don't want to be the first one there. That's just lame, dude."

Dustin grins and takes his advice. "Okay."

The look of joy on Dustin's face really shouldn't make Steve's heart clench. But the gratification he feels seeing the kid eager and excited is completely worth the fact that he's spending his Friday night helping Dustin impress his fellow middle schoolers.

After a while, Steve steps back to admire his work. Dustin's rocking the best mullet hairstyle Steve could manage. Not a single strand out of place—and damn if it doesn't look *great.*

"Holy shit!" Dustin's practically glowing when he sees himself in the mirror. "This looks awesome!"

Steve grins. It does look fucking awesome.

"Come on, shithead. The Snow Ball awaits."

~

"Here we are. So remember, once you get in there…"

"Pretend like I don't care."

"You don't care."

"I don't care!"

"There you go. You're learnin', my friend. You're learnin'."

Steve should probably try to take his own damn advice. He pulls his eyes away from Nancy through the windows of the building. She's beautiful and radiant, and even a month after their breakup, his heart can't help but pull at the mere sight of her. He hates himself for not being able to let go so easily. He blames himself for being second best. If it weren't for his lack of foresight, maybe losing her to Jonathan would have hurt less.

As he drives away, he sees a familiar blue Camaro parked on the other side of the lot. A familiar pain throbs between his temples. The strangest part is that he *wants* to talk to Billy. Despite the fact that, by all reason, he should want to stay away from the guy. Billy is violent and dangerous. He's hurt him before, badly. But there's something intoxicating about him that Steve can't quite explain. Something draws him closer to the guy. Maybe it's curiosity. Or maybe he's just addicted to the adrenaline rush.

Billy makes him question everything that he thought he knew about himself. His feelings for Nancy were always simple. Intense… but simple. Being with Billy is like falling into a different dimension. Steve might even know a thing or two about that.

He slowly pulls his car up next to the Camaro. Billy gives him a lazy glance with his arm hanging out the open window, a cigarette dangling from his lips.

Steve sighs and turns the engine off. The other man's face is expressionless, watching silently as he climbs out of his car and makes his way over. Steve clears his throat awkwardly when he steps beside the Camaro. "Hi."

"Hey," Billy grimaces and turns his head away. "Harrington."

"Funny seein' you here," Steve mutters. He shuffles on his feet outside Billy's car, choosing to lean against his own passenger door after a moment of silence. The lot feels strangely empty despite all the people around them, busy parents dropping off nervous, excited young tweens. "Don't suppose you feel like dancing'?" He jokes.

"Fuck off, Harrington."

Steve grimaces. Back to this again. “Right,” he mutters. “My bad, then.”

The air drains from his lungs and he’s already turning to walk away when Billy’s curses reach his ears.

“Wait, Harrington—*fuck*,” Billy mutters profanities under his breath. A moment later he steps out of his car, slamming the door behind him much louder than necessary.

“What?” Steve winces. “Gonna cuss me out again?” The pain between his eyes throbs once more. “You better not hit me,” he warns.

“No, I—” Billy looks pained for a moment before he breaks eye contact. He draws a shaky breath through his teeth. “I’m cool, Harrington.”

Steve snorts, but he settles back against the side of his car. His shoulders drop as the tension eases in the silence between them. They do this all too often. Billy’s hot one moment, then cold the next. Steve can hardly keep up.

“Smoke?” Billy offers quietly, holding out a half-full pack.

“Yeah.”

Steve takes a cigarette and the lighter that Billy’s held out for him. As his lungs fill with smoke, the tobacco calms his nerves. A silent moment passes as Billy lights up another cigarette.

They lean against their respective cars as they smoke, nothing but sober harshness in the air between them. Too much left unsaid. Steve’s eyes bore hard into Billy’s face and the other man looks away, stubbornly refusing to meet his gaze.

A familiar truck pulls up next to them before Steve can figure out what to say. He looks up to see Jim Hopper’s stern face. Inside the truck, Jane peaks out behind him to see what’s going on.

Billy tenses across from him.

“Everything okay here, boys?”

Steve side-eyes Billy. His lips twitch and he hides the grin that pulls at them because Billy actually looks nervous. The Chief's concern is endearing. Though they haven't spoken much, the older man's respect is a refreshing change of pace.

"Everything's fine, Hop." Steve says. "We're good."

He leans down to glance into the truck and gives the young girl inside a wave. "Hi, Jane," he smiles softly.

"Hi, Steve," she replies, a shy smile on her face.

"Alright," Hopper finally says. His eyes are intense on a stern, unfriendly face. Steve knows better than to be intimidated by it, but Billy thus far, has no such luxury. "You boys stay out of trouble."

Steve gives them a wave goodbye. Beside him, Billy's frowning as the Chief drives away.

"You know the Chief?" Billy grumbles. "The fuck, Harrington?"

"We've had a few encounters," Steve says lightly.

"I'm impressed," Billy says quietly. "Never took you for a badass."

"You have no idea," Steve tells him, his lips twitching. "There's a lot you don't know about me."

"I guess you're right."

Steve takes a final drag of his smoke before dropping it to the ground and stubbing it out with his shoe. "Are we good?" He asks. He's tired of not knowing. He's tired of second-guessing, unable to comprehend whatever the fuck Billy is thinking inside that thick skull of his. And Steve knows first hand with his knuckles how fucking hard his head is.

Billy doesn't answer.

Steve sighs, the exhaustion hitting him deep in his bones. "I'm tired, man. I'm sick of this," he admits. "You know, I feel like I should stay away from you, but… I can't."

Billy looks up, shocked from his confession.

“God, you are so fucked up.” And Steve’s not even thinking about how Billy might take that the wrong way. He’s just tired of walking on glass around him. Maybe he never really knew where he stood with Nancy, before. But now, if anything is going to continue with Billy, he needs to know *exactly* where he stands. “You’re just… so *angry*… all the time, and… dangerous. But I don’t want to stay away from you. Maybe I’m just a fucking idiot, or a sucker for punishment,” he scoffs and shakes his head. “Who the fuck knows? I guess that doesn’t say great things about me. But I like you. And I like spending time with you. And… I like what we do together.”

It doesn’t take a genius to interpret the look on Billy’s face. The other man looks more open and vulnerable than Steve has ever seen him before. And with that, he keeps speaking. “I can’t explain it but, if you’re goin’ through some shit… I want to be there for you.”

Something dark crosses Billy’s face.

“Don’t even start,” Steve mutters. “I don’t need you to tell me how queer that sounds. I’m just saying…” He sighs and closes his eyes. “I don’t know what the fuck I’m saying. Just… if you get angry… or pissed off because of whatever… you can always come to me.”

There’s silence between them and Steve almost wishes he’d never said anything at all.

“You actually sound like you care, Harrington,” Billy says gruffly.

Steve swallows stubbornly. “I just don’t want you to take it out on someone else, okay?” He remembers the look of fear on Max’s face. He remembers Tommy laying on the ground, blood dripping from his nose, his face a grimace of pain. “I can take it.”

Billy chuckles softly. “You’re a fucking idiot, you know that?”

“And you’re a fucking asshole,” Steve grits his teeth. He bites his lip hesitantly. “Sometimes you’re alright though.”

Billy doesn’t answer at first, long enough for seeds of panic to plant themselves in Steve’s chest. But then he smiles crookedly. “You forget

I kicked your ass to kingdom come," Billy smirks. "Maybe you *should* stay away from me."

But then Billy's smirk slowly shifts into something softer, and the air between them lightens.

"You caught me off guard," Steve admits stubbornly, a wry grin on his lips. "And you smashed a fucking plate over my head."

Billy looks away. Steve wonders if he's imagining the guilt on the other man's face.

"You're not still pissed about Tommy, are you?" Billy finally asks. "That asshole had it coming."

Steve shakes his head hollowly. There's too much history between him and Tommy. They haven't been friends in a long time. But as time passed, his stubbornness simmered into something else, and he couldn't turn a blind eye to Billy's rage.

"I still think you crossed a line."

Billy frowns. Confusion crosses his face as he gives a derisive snort. "Why do you fucking care so much?"

Steve sighs. "I know he can be an asshole—"

"Yeah, he can." Billy scoffs, cutting him off. "Are you about to say you're *friends?* Because I call bullshit on that one, Harrington."

Reluctance pulls achingly at Steve's chest. "We were," he says softly. "A long time ago." And it was. It seems a lifetime ago.

Billy's face seems to soften at the tone of his voice and he watches carefully as Steve sags against the side of his car.

"We've been friends since middle school," Steve says quietly. He sighs, remembering so many years ago, when things were simpler. A time before girls—a time before *Billy*—fuck, a time when monsters were only stories told to scare children in the dark.

Steve takes a slow breath, his expression a mix of nostalgia and

desolate acceptance. “He sat behind me in homeroom. Followed me around like a lost dog,” he chuckles softly.

Old memories berate him. Many are good ones. Some make him regret how this last year turned out for him. He remembers when Tommy first developed his crush on Carol, how he had panicked and came to him for advice, shy and scared. He remembers when Carol went from the cute girl with the sharp tongue, to *Tommy’s* girl, to Steve’s *friend*. They were shallow and vain. His head spins just thinking about them. Yet through all his trysts and romances, and all the problems he faced at home… through everything, Tommy and Carol always stood by his side.

There are definitely days when he misses that.

“Tommy’s a dick, but he always had my back,” Steve finally says.

Billy watches him carefully. “What happened?” He asks curiously.

“Nancy happened,” Steve says simply. He shakes his head, suddenly ashamed to admit how much of an effect this girl had on him. “She’s… she’s different than any other girl I’ve been with. She… made me want to be a better person, I guess. And… I don’t know, all of a sudden Tommy and Carol and… all the other people I hung out with, they just didn’t fit into the person I wanted to be.”

He suddenly looks up at Billy, who quickly turns away. And what is he now… without Nancy? Is he the guy who gets his dick sucked by Billy Hargrove in the seclusion of the locker room? Is he the guy who wishes Billy would kiss him when they’re alone? The guy who wishes the other man would open up to him, spill his secrets like they could actually be something *real?* Something in his chest aches with longing. It's a refreshing breath of air after everything that’s happened over the past year.

Maybe he’s just a guy who’s lost and doesn’t know who the fuck he is without Nancy Wheeler.

He swallows and drops his gaze. “Tommy didn’t take too kindly to that,” he finally mutters. “Maybe loyalty meant more to him than I gave him credit for.”

“You actually miss the guy?” Billy asks. His eyes are skeptical and searching. Steve doesn’t shy away from them.

“I kind of just miss having *friends,”* Steve gives a bit of a self-deprecating laugh. “Tommy and Carol… they weren’t much to write home about, but…” he chuckles again sadly. “They always had my back. And yeah… I do miss that.”

A moment of silence passes between them before Billy speaks again. “Is that what you’re fishin’ for here?”

Steve looks up. He finds himself frowning, his brows furrowed. “I don’t know. What are you offerin’?”

Billy shifts. A second passes and he smirks. “A blow job and a cup of joe?”

Steve can’t help but burst out into a laugh. His lungs ache for another cigarette. Billy grins widely in return.

“We’ve got two hours to kill,” Billy says softly.

“You picking up Max?”

Billy shrugs and then shakes his head. “She doesn’t really want me to, but… yeah, she’s kind of stuck with me.”

“Two hours, huh?”

Billy smirks. “You up for it, Harrington?”

Steve glances towards the middle school. Only a few years ago, he walked the halls of this school with Tommy and Carol. He never had a problem making friends, he never found himself without people by his side. Others always hung after him like he had something to be desired.

He can’t explain the longing he feels. He doesn’t know where the regret comes from. He only wishes he had done things differently.

“Yeah,” Steve finally nods. “Let’s go.”

Billy grins, wide and genuine. Steve thinks it's a good look on him.

"Quarry?" Billy asks.

Steve nods. "Two hours should be plenty of time."

Billy raises an eyebrow. "Maybe I'll surprise you, Harrington."

Steve doesn't tell him that every moment together is a surprise. He grins and lifts himself from the side of his car. Memories of what it feels like to have Billy under his palms crash through his mind. He suddenly aches to feel the other man's touch.

He's determined not to think of Nancy. Regrets over Tommy and Carol won't help him anymore. He puts the upside-down as far out of his mind as he possibly can.

All he wants right now is Billy. And that man is standing before him, eager and willing, an arrogant smirk on his lips that Steve wants to cover with his own mouth, even if the other man won't let him.

He meets Billy's gaze with as much calmness as he can muster. His fingers are already jangling his keys in his hand.

"Let's do this."

Author's Note:

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